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PR
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CHRISTMAS BOOKS

By

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

VOLUME I

WITH A PORTRAIT
FROM A SKETCH
By SAMUEL LAURENCE

DODGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
MAKERS OF BEAUTIFUL BOOKS
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INTRODUCTION

THERE is no better marked dividing line in taste than that which separates the votaries of Dickens from the votaries of Thackeray. Fundamentally Londoners both of them, the two great contemporary novelists belong evidently to the East and West—having common ground in Fleet Street and the City. The Osbornes and the Sedleys, the Hobsons and Newcomes, fall well within the sphere of Dickens, and David Copperfield must have rubbed shoulders with Pendennis. But Becky Sharp and Lord Steyne are as completely out of Dickens' knowledge as Sam Weller or Mrs. Gamp of Thackeray's. And, naturally, the methods of the two writers differ radically. Dickens continually tends to the accent of the street preacher, Thackeray to the tone of the drawing-room talker. Nowhere is this divergence more marked than in the Christmas Books, where each of the two exaggerates in a certain sense his own mannerism. Nowhere else does Thackeray limit himself so strictly to a satire upon manners: nowhere else does Dickens deal so exclusively in

"It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness. The last two people I heard speak of it were women: neither knew the other, or the author, and both said, by way of criticism, 'God bless him.'"

In that spirit also the next Christmas Book was undertaken. *The Chimes* was designed to be a national benefit—"a great blow for the poor." The chimes which Dickens heard with his outward ear, which suggested the title and so to say the refrain as well as the machinery of the story, were no English chimes. The *Carol*, so triumphant otherwise, had been financially a disappointment, *Chuzzlewit's* sale kept low, and a year of retrenchment abroad was decided on. In the autumn of 1844 Dickens found himself perched high above Genoa in a big house; and as he sat one morning at work, making difficult progress, all the clash of the city's innumerable bells came up on the wind and took a maddening hold on his nerves. It was an interruption, almost an injury, for the moment, but the inspiration came from it a day later. Yet, as he wrote to Forster, though the bells that clashed were Italian, "I see nothing but the old London belfry I have set them in." He was sick for London, too, as ever Private Atkins in India: craved after "the sights of 'er and the streets of 'er" as a stimulus to his work. And when his little book was finally sent off, nothing could stop him but he must rush to London for a

inal view of the proofs, and an evening in Forster's ooms, where he should read it to a select assembly —the Carlyles, Maclise, and Macready being those ne specially desired. Maclise has sketched the gathering, for which the novelist undertook that double journey in the dead of winter, when as yet railways were not: spending a matter of five weeks on the road between 6th November, when he left Genoa, and 22nd December, when he returned.

The little book, though very inferior in merit to its predecessor, has the interest of a generous pamphlet. The alderman who was bent on putting down suicide is no invention, and Dickens made his protest not without reason against the most callous philosophy ever invented. We read now with amazement that *The Chimes* was seriously censured as an incentive to disaffection. But those were the days when a cocksure political economy was in the full flush of its self-righteousness — a doctrine accepted with enthusiasm by the "warm men" of the City and their intellectual congeners. Most comfortable of creeds for the comfortably off, it consisted in denying the right to exist to all who had a difficulty in existing. Dickens remembered as he wrote that the *Westminster Review* had declared Scrooge's gift of the turkey an offence against the orthodoxy of economics, and he struck with all his force against the cuirass of selfish stupidity. The tendency of England has always been to regard poverty as a disgrace, almost a

misdemeanour; and if that characteristic attitude of prosperous individualism was somewhat modified in Dickens' lifetime, the credit is due in large measure to him.

The third of the series originated in 1845, after Dickens was returned from Italy to his house in Devonshire Terrace. The idea of editing a periodical was always strong with him; and he propounded to Forster his scheme for a weekly, "price three halfpence, if possible; partly original, partly select; notices of books, notices of theatres, notices of all good things, notices of all bad ones; *Carol* philosophy, cheerful views, sharp anatomisation of humbug, jolly good temper; papers always in season, pat to the time of year; and a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming reference in everything to Home and Fireside. And I would call it, Sir,

> **The Cricket**
>
> A cheerful creature that chirrups on the Hearth.—*Natural History.*"

But this project, further amplified in a style that would make Mr. Harmsworth ecstatic with approbation, came to nothing, or rather came to something quite different, as had been the case with the weekly

"Master Humphrey's Clock" that transformed itself into *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Forster opposed the notion, and it was finally swept away in the larger enterprise which resulted in the foundation that same year of the *Daily News*, with Charles Dickens as editor. Before, however, that came to pass, Dickens was already finding a new use for his title, in which he saw "a delicate and beautiful fancy for a Christmas book, making the Cricket a little household god — silent in the wrong and sorrow of the tale, and loud again when all went well and happy." Never was fancy more happily carried out than this in the opening pages of that rather absurd but delightful little production. I suppose few of us hear a cricket without thinking of it, and even a singing kettle is apt to bring it to mind. Yet however much one may slur the need for construction, it is difficult to pardon an author who deliberately and without justification misleads his readers as does Dickens with his hints at some mysterious love affair of little Dot's, which proves to have had no existence.

Of the other two not much need be said. *The Battle of Life* was written at Lausanne in 1846, in ill health largely induced by worry over the *Daily News*. Dickens only acted as editor for a few days, but the trouble connected with the business lasted longer. About the same time, when he was embarking on *Dombey and Son*, he conceived the idea—"a very ghostly and wild idea"—of the

"Haunted Man," but that story did not get itself written till two years later and in London. It was the last and least good of the series, and in spite of the genial glow which Dickens never failed to throw over his pictures of needy but happy interiors, I find it hard to enjoy. The supernatural machinery creaks.

What exactly was the attitude of Dickens towards the supernatural? I see no trace in him of that simple elementary belief in ghosts—that is, in the existence of spirits of the dead, or fairies, or other powers of earth and air—which every Catholic peasant in Ireland or Scotland holds. The ghosts that Dickens deals in are either ghosts with a purpose, melodramatic interveners, like the shade of old Marley; or else embodiments of an abstract idea, like the Spirit of Christmas or the phantom in *The Haunted Man*. And yet I think it is clear that, like most imaginative people, Dickens believed in apparitions. There is a very curious passage in a letter to Forster describing his visit to a prison in America. Seeing the inmates in solitary confinement, the idea struck him — Suppose a man so immured should see ghosts! He asked one of them, under the impression of this thought, "Do you ever dream?" and whether he projected his thought into the man's countenance, or whether he hit intuitively on an unspoken torment, his question brought before his eye a vision of anguish and terror on the face of the prisoner. But if Dickens had

ealt with ghosts that he really believed in, the tale would certainly have ended in madness and horror, and been far out of place in one of his cheerful annuals.

Year by year the great preacher of "*Carol Philosophy*" (to use his own word) was studious to present his readers with a ring of happy faces, an atmosphere of domestic bliss: and undoubtedly he succeeded. What then, one may inquire of the philosopher, is the sovereign cordial—the secret of happiness? Generous emotion, Dickens would answer; that spirit of Christmas which includes the home circle and all however remotely connected with it—even a pestilent curmudgeon of an uncle—in one "most broad beneficent embrace." But the best of goodwill requires a medium in which to convey itself, and the medium for which Dickens plumps without hesitating is food and drink—for choice, turkey and plum pudding diluted with rum punch. It was once observed to me that in all great work there is a very strong realisation of sensual pleasure—a full taste of life—and that Dickens, writing in a generation which abooed all reference to the sensuous side of sex emotion, found a safety valve in exuberant depicting of the pleasures of the table. And certainly there is in this little volume an amazing deal about eating and drinking. The emotional centre of your picture of happiness is always some kind of dish. Dickens grows lyrical over the heaped up

viands that make the throne of the Christmas Spirit: lyrical over the Christmas streets with their display of "great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts—ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars": and then "the Grocers'! oh the Grocers'!" The whole passage glows like an Elizabethan poet's rhapsody on his mistress. Or again, think of the actual scenes—Bob Cratchit's Christmas dinner; the young Scrooges' family party; Toby Veck's tripe and hot potatoes: these are the things that stand out in memory, so surprising is the vigour and gusto with which they are described. Here is no question of writing beautifully about a broomstick; the emotion is spontaneous, heartfelt, and extremely English. Take it all round, there is no writer of the nineteenth century so entirely English as Dickens, so little influenced by any foreign culture; and nothing in his work is more typical than the *Christmas Carol.* Long consecrated to charitable recitations, it has become an institution rather than a work, and will be found to contain almost exactly the same ingredients as the ideal British Sunday. It presents a mild carnival of domestic emotion, lightly coloured by religion, and inseparably connected with the enjoyment of a heavy meal.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

IN PROSE

BEING

A GHOST STORY OF CHRISTMAS

STAVE ONE

MARLEY'S GHOST

MARLEY was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The egister of his burial was signed by the clergyman, he clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good pon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his and to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my wn knowledge, what there is particularly dead bout a door-nail. I might have been inclined, yself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece f ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of ur ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed ands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done or. You will therefore permit me to repeat, mphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-ail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he ere partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad

event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names: it was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always

out with him ; he iced his office in the dog-days ; nd didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on crooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry eather chill him. No wind that blew was itterer than he, no falling snow was more intent pon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to ntreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to ave him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, nd sleet, could boast of the advantage over him n only one respect. They often "came down" andsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, ith gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are ou? When will you come to see me?" No eggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children sked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ver once in all his life inquired the way to such nd such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind en's dogs appeared to know him; and when hey saw him coming on, would tug their owners to doorways and up courts ; and then would wag heir tails as though they said, "No eye at all is etter than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care? It was the very hing he liked. To edge his way along the rowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy o keep its distance, was what the knowing ones all "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the ear, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in is counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the eople in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and

stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them. The City clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and

andsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked gain.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's ephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure."

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason ave you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason ave you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the pur of the moment, said, "Bah!" again; and ollowed it up with "Humbug."

"Don't be cross, uncle," said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for aying bills without money; a time for finding ourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a ime for balancing your books and having every tem in 'em through a round dozen of months resented dead against you? If I could work my vill," said Scrooge, indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas,' on his lips, hould be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He hould!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle, sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge.

"Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew: "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

The clerk in the Tank involuntarily applauded: becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

"Let me hear another sound from *you*," said Scrooge, "and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. You're quite a powerful speaker, Sir," he added, turning to his nephew. "I wonder you don't go into Parliament."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow."

Scrooge said that he would see him——yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

"But why?" cried Scrooge's nephew. Why?"

"Why did you get married?" said Scrooge.

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge, s if that were the only one thing in the world ıore ridiculous than a merry Christmas. "Good fternoon!"

"Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me efore that happened. Why give it as a reason or not coming now?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of ou; why cannot we be friends?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so esolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which have been a party. But I have made the trial n homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas ıumour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

"And A Happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

"There's another fellow," muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: "my clerk, with fifteen shillings a-week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam."

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with

their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word "liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, Sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, Sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at

rst, that something had occurred to stop them in ıeir useful course," said Scrooge. "I'm very lad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish :hristian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," eturned the gentleman, "a few of us are en-eavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some ıeat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose his time, because it is a time, of all others, when Vant is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. 'Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that s my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people nerry. I help to support the establishments I ıave mentioned: they cost enough: and those who ıre badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides—excuse me—I don't know that."

"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.

"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew.

Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slily down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers' and grocers' trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of

> "God bless you, merry gentleman!
> May nothing you dismay!"

Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, Sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I sup-

pose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning!"

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman's-buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and have forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as

ttle of what is called fancy about him as any man ı the City of London, even including—which is a old word—the corporation, aldermen, and livery. ,et it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not estowed one thought on Marley, since his last ıention of his seven-years' dead partner that fternoon. And then let any man explain to me, ; he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having is key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, vithout its undergoing any intermediate process of hange: not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable hadow as the other objects in the yard were, but ıad a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but ooked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or ıot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid :olour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to ɔe in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather :han a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, t was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it ıad been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had elinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and ighted his candle.

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into

the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on; so he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall and up the stairs: slowly too: trimming his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about driving a coach-and-six up a good old flight of stairs, or through a bad young Act of Parliament; but I mean to say you might have got a hearse up that staircase, and taken it broadwise, with the splinter-bar towards the wall, and the door towards the balustrades, and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare; which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom. Half-a-dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that; darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob.

Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaohs' daughters, Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures, to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance

happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried "I know him! Marley's Ghost!" and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail; and it was made

for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before: he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

"Much!"—Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who *were* you then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're particular — for a shade." He was going to say "*to* a shade," but substituted this, as more appropriate.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it then."

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explana-

tion. But the Ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed, glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven.

"You see this toothpick?" said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision's stony gaze from himself.

"I do," replied the Ghost.

"You are not looking at it," said Scrooge.

"But I see it," said the Ghost, "notwithanding."

"Well!" returned Scrooge. "I have but to vallow this, and be for the rest of my days perseıted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. [umbug, I tell you—humbug!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook ; chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, ıat Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save imself from falling in a swoon. But how much eater was his horror, when the phantom taking f the bandage round its head, as if it were too arm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down pon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands efore his face.

"Mercy!" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why o you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the Ghost, do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do irits walk the earth, and why do they come to e?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost reırned, "that the spirit within him should walk road among his fellow-men, and travel far and de; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is ndemned to do so after death. It is doomed to nder through the world—oh, woe is me!—and itness what it cannot share, but might have shared ı earth, and turned to happiness!"

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its ıain, and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replie the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard b yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and c my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strang to *you?*"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost "the weight and length of the strong coil you bea yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured o it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in th expectation of finding himself surrounded by som fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he coul see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jaco Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me Jacob."

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "I comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, an is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds o men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A ver little more, is all permitted to me. I cannot rest I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spiri never walked beyond our counting-house—mar me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond th narrow limits of our money-changing hole; an weary journeys lie before me!"

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he becam thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did s now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting o his knees.

"You must have been very slow about it, Jacob," Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference.

"Slow!" the Ghost repeated.

"Seven years dead," mused Scrooge. "And travelling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

"Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know, that ages of incessant labour, by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of

water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the rolling year," the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me!*"

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is no light part of my penance," pursued the Ghost. "I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. "Thank'ee!"

"You will be haunted," resumed the Ghost, "by Three Spirits."

Scrooge's countenance fell almost as low as the Ghost's had done.

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, cob?" he demanded, in a faltering voice.

"It is."

"I—I think I'd rather not," said Scrooge.

"Without their visits," said the Ghost, "you nnot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the st to-morrow, when the bell tolls one."

"Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it er, Jacob?" hinted Scrooge.

"Expect the second on the next night at the me hour. The third upon the next night when e last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. ook to see me no more; and look that, for your wn sake, you remember what has passed between !"

When it had said these words, the spectre took s wrapper from the table, and bound it round its ead, as before. Scrooge knew this, by the smart und its teeth made, when the jaws were brought gether by the bandage. He ventured to raise his es again, and found his supernatural visitor cononting him in an erect attitude, with its chain ound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and every step it took, the window raised itself a little, that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. hen they were within two paces of each other, arley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to me no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and ar: for on the raising of the hand, he became nsible of confused noises in the air; incoherent unds of lamentation and regret; wailings inxpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The

spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in t mournful dirge; and floated out upon the blea dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window: desperate his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wanderi hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning they went. Every one of them wore chains li Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guil governments) were linked together; none we free. Many had been personally known to Scroo in their lives. He had been quite familiar wi one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a mo strous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cri piteously at being unable to assist a wretche woman with an infant, whom it saw below, up a door-step. The misery with them all wa clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mi enshrouded them, he could not tell. But the and their spirit voices faded together; and th night became as it had been when he walke home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined th door by which the Ghost had entered. It w double-locked, as he had locked it with his ow hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He trie to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the fir syllable. And being, from the emotion he ha undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or h glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull co versation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hou much in need of repose; went straight to be without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instan

STAVE TWO

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

WHEN Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavouring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve; and stopped.

"Why, it isn't possible," said Scrooge, "that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon!"

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything;

and could see very little then. All he could mak out was, that it was still very foggy and extremel cold, and that there was no noise of people runnin to and fro, and making a great stir, as there un questionably would have been if night had beate off bright day, and taken possession of the world This was a great relief, because "three days afte sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr Ebenezer Scrooge or his order," and so forth would have become a mere United States' securit if there were no days to count by.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought. Marley's Ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it was all a dream, his mind flew back again, like a strong spring released, to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through, "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chimes had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding, dong!"

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"Half-past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly "and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to him as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which

was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was *not* its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glittered now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant, at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever.

"Are you the Spirit, Sir, whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am!"

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long past?" inquired Scrooge: observant of its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he

d a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; d begged him to be covered.

"What!" exclaimed the Ghost, "would you soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I ve? Is it not enough that you are one of those nose passions made this cap, and force me through nole trains of years to wear it low upon my ow!"

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to end, or any knowledge of having wilfully "bonted" the Spirit at any period of his life. He en made bold to inquire what business brought m there.

"Your welfare!" said the Ghost.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but uld not help thinking that a night of unbroken st would have been more conducive to that end. he Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it id immediately:

"Your reclamation, then. Take heed!"

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped m gently by the arm.

"Rise! and walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead at the weather and the hour were not adapted to edestrian purposes; that bed was warm, and the ermometer a long way below freezing; that he s clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, d nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at at time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's nd, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, lasped its robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and able to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there*," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long forgotten!

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervour—"I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road; Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them

ith boys upon their backs, who called to other ›ys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. ll these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to ch other, until the broad fields were so full of erry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have en," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousss of us."

The jocund travellers came on; and as they me, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Vhy was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see em! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his :art leap up as they went past! Why was he led with gladness when he heard them give each her Merry Christmas, as they parted at crossads and bye-ways, for their several homes! Vhat was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out ›on merry Christmas! What good had it ever ›ne to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the host. "A solitary child, neglected by his iends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered ne, and soon approached a mansion of dull red ick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, ı the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a rge house, but one of broken fortunes; for the acious offices were little used, their walls were mp and mossy, their windows broken, and their tes decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the bles; and the coach-houses and sheds were verrun with grass. Nor was it more retentive f its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary all, and glancing through the open doors of many

rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading an ass laden with wood by the bridle.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! And what's his

me, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, the Gate of Damascus; don't you see him! nd the Sultan's Groom turned upside down by e Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him ght. I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to married to the Princess!"

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and see his heightened and excited face; would ve been a surprise to his business friends in the ty, indeed.

"There's the Parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green dy and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce owing out of the top of his head; there he is! oor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came me again after sailing round the island. 'Poor obin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin usoe?' The man thought he was dreaming, t he wasn't. It was the Parrot, you know. here goes Friday, running for his life to the little eek! Halloa! Hoop! Halloo!"

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign his usual character, he said, in pity for his former lf, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

"I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: "but it's too late w."

"What is the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "Nothing. There s a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door st night. I should like to have given him someing: that's all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its

hand: saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrank, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, brimful of glee. "Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first,

e're to be together all the Christmas long, and ave the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed ne boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to ouch his head; but being too little, laughed again, nd stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she egan to drag him, in her childish eagerness, owards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, ccompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Aaster Scrooge's box, there!" and in the hall ppeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Aaster Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, nd threw him into a dreadful state of mind by haking hands with him. He then conveyed him nd his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering est-parlour that ever was seen, where the maps pon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes n the windows, were waxy with cold. Here he roduced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a lock of curiously heavy cake, and administered nstalments of those dainties to the young people: t the same time, sending out a meagre servant to ffer a glass of "something" to the postboy, who nswered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it as the same tap as he had tasted before, he had ther not. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this me tied on to the top of the chaise, the children ade the schoolmaster good-bye right willingly; nd getting into it, drove gaily down the garden-weep: the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost nd snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens ike spray.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath

might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right. I'll not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!"

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battled for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here?"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and

ılled out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial oice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, ıame briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-ɔrentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" said Scrooge to ıe Ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. He vas very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!"

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No ıore work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters p," cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his ands, "before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows vent at it! They charged into the street with the hutters—one, two, three—had 'em up in their laces—four, five, six—barred 'em and pinned 'em —seven, eight, nine—and came back before you ould have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down rom the high desk, with wonderful agility. "Clear way, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!"

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't ıave cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a ıinute. Every movable was packed off, as if it vere dismissed from public life for evermore; the loor was swept and watered, the lamps were rimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and ɔright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon ı winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress. In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once, hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them. When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter; and he were a bran-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, ıd more dances, and there was cake, and there as negus, and there was a great piece of Cold oast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, ıd there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. ut the great effect of the evening came after the oast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful og, mind! The sort of man who knew his ısiness better than you or I could have told it him!) ruck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old 'ezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. 'op couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work ut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of artners; people who were not to be trifled with; eople who *would* dance, and had no notion of 'alking.

But if they had been twice as many: ah, four mes: old Fezziwig would have been a match ɔr them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *er*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense f the term. If that's not high praise, tell me igher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared ɔ issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in very part of the dance like moons. You couldn't ave predicted, at any given time, what would ecome of 'em next. And when old Fezziwig nd Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the ance; advance and retire, hold hands with your artner; bow and curtsey; corkscrew; thread-e-needle, and back again to your place; 'ezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again vithout a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic all broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their

stations, one on either side the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said,

"Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and

ooks; in things so slight and insignificant that it s impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it ost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think?" the Ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge, "No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all."

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. 'Quick!"

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"It matters little," she said, softly. "To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What Idol has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one."

"This is the even-handed dealing of the world!" he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!"

"You fear the world too much," she answered, gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you."

She shook her head.

"Am I?"

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man."

"I was a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are," she returned. "I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can release you."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words. No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in

ıother atmosphere of life; another Hope as its ·eat end. In everything that made my love of ıy worth or value in your sight. If this had ·ver been between us," said the girl, looking ildly, but with steadiness, upon him; "tell me, ould you seek me out and try to win me now? ıh, no!"

He seemed to yield to the justice of this sup- ɔsition, in spite of himself. But he said with struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," ıe answered, "Heaven knows! When *I* have ·arned a Truth like this, I know how strong ıd irresistible it must be. But if you were free ɔ-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe ıat you would choose a dowerless girl—you who, ı your very confidence with her, weigh everything y Gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you ·ere false enough to your one guiding principle to o so, do I not know that your repentance and egret would surely follow? I do; and I release ou. With a full heart, for the love of him you nce were."

He was about to speak; but with her head ırned from him, she resumed.

"You may—the memory of what is past half ıakes me hope you will—have pain in this. A ·ery, very brief time, and you will dismiss the ·collection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable dream, ·om which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture ne?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like the last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw *her*, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem, they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to be one of them! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I wouldn't for the wealth of all the world have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down; and for the precious little shoe, I wouldn't have plucked it off, God bless my soul! to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport, as they did, bold young brood, I couldn't have done it; I should have expected my arm to have grown round it for a punishment, and never come straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have

opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest license of a child, and yet been man enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne towards it the centre of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenceless porter! The scaling him with chairs for ladders to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round the neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll's frying-pan into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey, glued on a wooden platter! The immense relief of finding this a false alarm! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy! They are all indescribable alike. It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the parlour and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with

her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"Guess!"

"How can I? Tut, don't I know?" she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr. Scrooge."

"Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot bear it!"

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.

"Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its

adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

AWAKING in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But, finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he put them every one aside with his own hands, and lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.

Gentlemen of the free-and-easy sort, who plume themselves on being acquainted with a move or two and being usually equal to the time-of-day, express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter; between which opposite extremes, no doubt, there lies a tolerably wide and comprehensive range of subjects. With-

out venturing for Scrooge quite as hardily as this, I don't mind calling on you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he lay upon his bed, the very core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which, being only light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant, or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensive that he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, without having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as you or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it, and would unquestionably have done it too—at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising

transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrifaction of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in! and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me!"

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple deep green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice.

ts feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the arment, were also bare; and on its head it wore o other covering than a holly wreath set here and nere with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls vere long and free; free as its genial face, its parkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its nconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded ound its middle was an antique scabbard; but no word was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten p with rust.

"You have never seen the like of me before!" xclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger nembers of my family; meaning (for I am very oung) my elder brothers born in these later years?" ursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am fraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for!" muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct ne where you will. I went forth last night on ompulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working ow. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, et me profit by it."

"Touch my robe!"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, ame, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, ies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished nstantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy

glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses: whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been ploughed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and waggons; furrows that crossed and re-crossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off, and made intricate channels, hard to trace, in the thick yellow mud and icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

For, the people who were shovelling away on the house-tops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball—better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest—laughing heartily if it went right and not less heartily if it

'ent wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half pen, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their lory. There were great, round, pot-bellied askets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats f jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and umbling out into the street in their apoplectic pulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-irthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of heir growth like Spanish Friars; and winking rom their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as hey went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up nistletoe. There were pears and apples, clustered igh in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence, to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk Biffins, squab, and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on; and, to a fish, went gasping round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grocers'! oh the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted

company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and subsequently bilious. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress: but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the door, clashing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes in the best humour possible; while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at if they chose.

But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of bye-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor revellers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker's doorway, and taking off the covers as

ıeir bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their inners from his torch. And it was a very unommon kind of torch, for once or twice when ıere were angry words between some dinnerarriers who had jostled with each other, he shed few drops of water on them from it, and their ood humour was restored directly. For they aid, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it ras!

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers were ıut up; and yet there was a genial shadowing orth of all these dinners and the progress of their ooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each aker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if its ones were cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle om your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this ay?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought, I wonder you, of all the beings in the many orlds about us, should desire to cramp these eople's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of ning every seventh day, often the only day on hich they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh

Day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."

"*I* seek!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's), that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen "Bob" a-week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, ressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but rave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a oodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, ssisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, lso brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit lunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and etting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and eir in honour of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced o find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to how his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now wo smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, creaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the oose, and known it for their own; and basking in uxurious thoughts of sage-and-onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, lthough his collars nearly choked him) blew the ire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked oudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

"What has ever got your precious father then?" aid Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha warn't as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour!"

"Here's Martha, mother!" said a girl, appearing s she spoke.

"Here's Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's *such* a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late ou are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen imes, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night,"

replied the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother!"

"Well! Never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!"

"No, no! There's father coming," cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim's blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming upon Christmas Day!"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so

nuch, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer; Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course—and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said.

It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by the apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage-and-onion to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That

as the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit ntered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the udding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and rm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited randy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck nto the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, nd calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest uccess achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their narriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight vas off her mind, she would confess she had had er doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody ad something to say about it, but nobody said or hought it was at all a small pudding for a large amily. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a hing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was leared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon he table, and a shovelful of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, n what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half ı one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass. Two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

"No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared."

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

"Man," said the Ghost, "if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!"

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and

embling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he ised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr. crooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried rs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him ere. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast on, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas ay."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said e, "on which one drinks the health of such an lious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. ou know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it tter than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas ay."

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the ay's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his. Long e to him! A Merry Christmas and a Happy ew Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was e first of their proceedings which had no hearti- ss in it. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he dn't care twopence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre the family. The mention of his name cast a rk shadow on the party, which was not dispelled full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times rrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge Baleful being done with. Bob Cratchit told em how he had a situation in his eye for Master eter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five- d-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits

laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favour when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord "was much about as tall as Peter"; at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and bye-and-bye they had a song, about a lost child travelling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was

onderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze owed preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot ates baking through and through before the fire, d deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to shut t cold and darkness. There, all the children of e house were running out into the snow to meet eir married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, d be the first to greet them. Here, again, were adows on the window-blind of guests assembling; d there a group of handsome girls, all hooded d fur-booted, and all chattering at once, tripped htly off to some near neighbour's house; where, e upon the single man who saw them enter—ful witches: well they knew it—in a glow!

But if you had judged from the numbers of ople on their way to friendly gatherings, you ght have thought that no one was at home to e them welcome when they got there, instead of ery house expecting company, and piling up its es half-chimney high. Blessings on it, how the host exulted! How it bared its breadth of east, and opened its capacious palm, and floated , outpouring, with a generous hand, its bright d harmless mirth on everything within its reach! he very lamplighter, who ran on before dotting e dusky street with specks of light, and who was essed to spend the evening somewhere, laughed loudly as the Spirit passed: though little kenned lamplighter that he had any company but ristmas!

And now, without a word of warning from the ost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, ere monstrous masses of rude stone were cast out, as though it were the burial-place of giants; d water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or

would have done so, but for the frost that held i prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze and coarse, rank grass. Down in the west th setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, whicl glared upon the desolation for an instant, like sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who labour in th bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "Bu they know me. See!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, anc swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing througl the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerfu company assembled round a glowing fire. An old old man and woman, with their children and thei children's children, and another generation beyonc that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire The old man, in a voice that seldom rose abov the howling of the wind upon the barren waste was singing them a Christmas song; it had been a very old song when he was a boy; and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely a they raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped, hi vigour sank again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled, and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the wind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the water—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them: the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be: struck up a sturdy song that was like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listenin to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what solemn thing it was to move on through the lonel darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depth were secrets as profound as Death: it was a grea surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise t Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew's an to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, an looking at that same nephew with approvin affability.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha ha, ha!"

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance to know a man more blest in a laugh than Scrooge' nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll cultivat his acquaintance.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment o things, that while there is infection in disease an sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibl contagious as laughter and good-humour. Whe Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way: holdin his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his fac into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge' niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. An their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand roared out, lustily.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge' niece, indignantly. Bless those women; they

never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seemed made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory, too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory!

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him."

"I'm sure he is very rich, Fred," hinted Scrooge's niece. "At least you always tell *me* so."

"What of that, my dear!" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking—ha, ha, ha!—that he is ever going to benefit Us with it."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece. Scrooge's niece's sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, I have!" said Scrooge's nephew. "I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well! I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't any great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *you* say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the plump one with the lace tucker: not the one with the roses—blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge's niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!"

Scrooge's nephew revelled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do it with aromatic vinegar; his example was unanimously followed.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldy old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I defy him

—if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying 'Uncle Scrooge, how are you?' If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that's* something; and I think I shook him yesterday."

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle joyously.

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about, when they sang a Glee or Catch, I can assure you: especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere nothing: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes), which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the Ghost of Christmas Past. When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder

was a child himself. Stop! There was first a game at blindman's-buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is, that it was a done thing between him and Scrooge's nephew: and that the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker, was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping up against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains, wherever she went, there went he. He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him, as some of them did, and stood there; he would have made a feint of endeavouring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding; and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair; and it really was not. But when at last, he caught her; when, in spite of all her silken rustlings, and her rapid flutterings past him, he got her into a corner whence there was no escape; then his conduct was the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it was necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck; was vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when, another blind man being in office, they were so very confidential together, behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece was not one of the blindman's-buff party, but was made comfortable with a large

chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the forfeits, and loved her love to admiration with all the letters of the alphabet. Likewise at the game of How, When, and Where, she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, beat her sisters hollow: though they were sharp girls too, as Topper could have told you. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge; for, wholly forgetting in the interest he had in what was going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out with his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too; for the sharpest needle, best Whitechapel, warranted not to cut in the eye, was not sharper than Scrooge: blunt as he took it in his head to be.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favour, that he begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

"Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half-hour, Spirit, only one!"

It is a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't made a show of, and wasn't led by anybody, and didn't

live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter; and was so inexpressibly tickled, that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

"I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!"

"What is it?" cried Fred.

"It's your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!"

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" ought to have been "Yes"; inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that way.

"He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!'"

"Well! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!" said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath

of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask," said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange, and not belong-

ing to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw!"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for

on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And bide the end!"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

STAVE FOUR

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

THE Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?" said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed downward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted

for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But, as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on!" said Scrooge. "Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!"

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; on 'Change, amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and

chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals; and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. "I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first, with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his Company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to *me*. That's all I know."

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker; "for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?"

"I don't mind going if a lunch is provided," observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. "But I must be fed, if I make one."

Another laugh.

"Well, I am the most disinterested among you,

after all," said the first speaker, "for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I'll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!"

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is: strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn't it?"

"Seasonable for Christmas time. You're not a skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning!"

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could

scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. But nothing doubting that to whomsoever they applied they had some latent moral for his own improvement, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged

their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal-stove, made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a frousy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters, hung upon a line; and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them, than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

"Let the charwoman alone to be the first!" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it!"

"You couldn't have met in a better place," said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two an't strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There an't such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I'm sure there's no such old bones here, as mine. Ha, ha! We're all suitable to our calling, we're well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour."

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor, and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

"What odds then! What odds, Mrs. Dilber!" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did!"

"That's true, indeed!" said the laundress. "No man more so."

"Why, then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser? We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose?"

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Dilber and the man together. "We should hope not."

"Very well, then!" cried the woman. "That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, wicked old screw," pursued the woman, "why vasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, ıe'd have had somebody to look after him when he vas struck with Death, instead of lying gasping ıut his last there, alone by himself."

"It's the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier one," replied the voman; "and it should have been, you may de-ɔend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on ınything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let ne know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm ıot afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see t. We knew pretty well that we were helping ɔurselves, before we met here, I believe. It's no ;in. Open the bundle, Joe."

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow ɔf this; and the man in faded black, mounting the ɔreach first, produced *his* plunder. It was not :xtensive. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of ;leeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were severally examined and ıppraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each, upon the wall, and added :hem up into a total when he found there was ;othing more to come.

"That's your account," said Joe, "and I vouldn't give another sixpence, if I was to be ;oiled for not doing it. Who's next?"

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver tea-ɔoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her ıccount was stated on the wall in the same manner.

"I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself," said old Joe. "That's your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I'd repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown."

"And now undo *my* bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"Ah!" returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains!"

"You don't mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?" said Joe.

"Yes I do," replied the woman. "Why not?"

"You were born to make your fortune," said Joe, "and you'll certainly do it."

"I certainly shan't hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as He was, I promise you, Joe," returned the woman coolly. "Don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now."

"His blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think?" replied the woman. "He isn't likely to take cold without 'em, I dare say."

"I hope he didn't die of anything catching? Eh?" said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

"Don't you be afraid of that," returned the oman. "I an't so fond of his company that 'd loiter about him for such things, if he did. ıh! you may look through that shirt till your yes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a ıreadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine ne too. They'd have wasted it, if it hadn't been ɔr me."

"What do you call wasting of it?" asked old oe.

"Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure," eplied the woman with a laugh. "Somebody ras fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. f calico an't good enough for such a purpose, it ın't good enough for anything. It's quite as ecoming to the body. He can't look uglier than e did in that one."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As hey sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty ight afforded by the old man's lamp, he viewed hem with a detestation and disgust, which could ardly have been greater, though they had been bscene demons, marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when ld Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, old out their several gains upon the ground. 'This is the end of it, you see! He frightened ery one away from him when he was alive, to rofit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, shuddering from head foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy ıan might be my own. My life tends that way, ıow. Merciful Heaven, what is this!"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, nd now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncur-

tained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand WAS open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts?

varice, hard dealing, griping cares? They have ought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay, in the dark empty house, with not a an, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind me in this or that, and for the memory of one nd word I will be kind to him. A cat was aring at the door, and there was a sound of awing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What *they* anted in the room of death, and why they were restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to ink.

"Spirit!" he said, "this is a fearful place. In aving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. et us go!"

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I ould do it, if I could. But I have not the power, pirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

"If there is any person in the town, who feels notion caused by this man's death," said Scrooge uite agonised, "show that person to me, Spirit, beseech you!"

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him r a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, vealed a room by daylight, where a mother and er children were.

She was expecting some one, and with anxious gerness; for she walked up and down the room; tarted at every sound; looked out from the indow; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, o work with her needle; and could hardly bear he voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard.

She hurried to the door, and met her husband; man whose face was careworn and depressed though he was young. There was a remarkabl expression in it now; a kind of serious delight c which he felt ashamed, and which he struggled t repress.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoard ing for him by the fire; and when she asked hir faintly what news (which was not until after long silence), he appeared embarrassed how t answer.

"Is it good," she said, "or bad?"—to hel him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined?"

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"If *he* relents," she said, amazed, "there is Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past relenting," said her husband. "He is dead."

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment, and was sorry; but the first was the emotion of her heart.

"What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay; and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then."

"To whom will our debt be transferred?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money; and even though we

ere not, it would be bad fortune indeed to find merciless a creditor in his successor. We may ep to-night with light hearts, Caroline!"

Yes. Soften it as they would, their hearts were hter. The children's faces, hushed, and clustered und to hear what they so little understood, were ighter; and it was a happier house for this man's ath! The only emotion that the Ghost could ow him, caused by the event, was one of easure.

"Let me see some tenderness connected with a ath," said Scrooge; "or that dark chamber, pirit, which we left just now, will be for ever esent to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several streets miliar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge oked here and there to find himself, but nowhere as he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratit's house; the dwelling he had visited before; id found the mother and the children seated round e fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits ere as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The other and her daughters were engaged in sewing. ut surely they were very quiet!

"'And He took a child, and set him in the idst of them.'"

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He d not dreamed them. The boy must have read em out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and ut her hand up to her face.

"The colour hurts my eyes," she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They're better now again," said Cratchit wife. "It makes them weak by candlelight; ar I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father wh he comes home, for the world. It must be ne his time."

"Past it rather," Peter answered, shutting u his book. "But I think he's walked a little slow than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she sai and in a steady cheerful voice, that only falter once:

"I have known him walk with—I have know him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, ver fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. So ha all.

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed intent upon her work, "and his father loved him so that it was no trouble—no trouble. And there i your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob i his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow— came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, "Don't mind it, father. Don't be grieved!"

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday he said.

"Sunday! You went to-day then, Robert?" d his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you uld have gone. It would have done you good to how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. romised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. y little, little child!" cried Bob. "My little ild!"

He broke down all at once. He couldn't help If he could have helped it, he and his child uld have been farther apart perhaps than they re.

He left the room, and went upstairs into the om above, which was lighted cheerfully, and ng with Christmas. There was a chair set close side the child, and there were signs of some one ving been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in and when he had thought a little and composed mself, he kissed the little face. He was recon- led to what had happened, and went down again ite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls d mother working still. Bob told them of the traordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge's nephew, hom he had scarcely seen but once, and who, eeting him in the street that day, and seeing that looked a little—"just a little down you know," d Bob, inquired what had happened to distress n. "On which," said Bob, "for he is the asantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told m. 'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,' e said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' y the bye, how he ever knew *that*, I don't now."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that!" said Peter.

"Very well observed, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Pray come to me.' Now, wasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim and felt with us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

"You would be surer of it, my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised, mark what I say, if he got Peter a better situation."

"Only hear that, Peter," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself."

"Get along with you!" retorted Peter, grinning.

"It's just as likely as not," said Bob, "one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we—or this first parting that there was among us?"

"Never, father!" cried they all.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

"No, never, father!" they all cried again.

"I am very happy," said little Bob, "I am very ppy!"

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed n, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and ter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny m, thy childish essence was from God!

"Spectre," said Scrooge, "something informs that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, t I know not how. Tell me what man that was om we saw lying dead?"

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed n, as before — though at a different time, he ought: indeed, there seemed no order in these ter visions, save that they were in the Future— o the resorts of business men, but showed him t himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for ything, but went straight on, as to the end just w desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for moment.

"This court," said Scrooge, "through which hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, d has been for a length of time. I see the house. et me behold what I shall be, in days to come!"

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewere.

"The house is yonder," Scrooge exclaimed. Why do you point away?"

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, d looked in. It was an office still, but not his. he furniture was not the same, and the figure in e chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and

whither he had gone, accompanied it until the reached an iron gate. He paused to look roun before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched ma whose name he had now to learn, lay underneat the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled i by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growt of vegetation's death, not life; choked up with to much burying; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place!

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointe down to One. He advanced towards it trembling The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but h dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solem shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things tha Will be, or are they shadows of things that Ma be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grav by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, t which, if persevered in, they must lead," sai Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge.

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not the man I must have been but for this intercourse. 'hy show me this, if I am past all hope!"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ound he fell before it: "Your nature intercedes r me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may ange these shadows you have shown me, by an ered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, e Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all hree shall strive within me. I will not shut it the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I ay sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It ught to free itself, but he was strong in his treaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger t, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in one last prayer to have s fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the antom's hood and dress. It shrank, collapsed, d dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE

THE END OF IT

YES! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here: I am here: the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time: turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them,

.king them parties to every kind of extrava-
nce.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, ıghing and crying in the same breath; and ıking a perfect Laocoön of himself with his ›ckings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as ppy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. am as giddy as a drunken man. A Merry ıristmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was w standing there: perfectly winded.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in!" ied Scrooge, starting off again, and frisking und the fireplace. "There's the door, by which e Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There's e corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present :! There's the window where I saw the wander-g Spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all ppened. Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice r so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most ustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line brilliant laughs!

"I don't know what day of the month it is!" d Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been ıong the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm ite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd ther be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo re!"

He was checked in his transports by the churches nging out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. lash, clang, hammer, ding, dong, bell. Bell, ›ng, ding, hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, orious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and pu out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the bloo to dance to; golden sunlight; heavenly sky sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious Glorious!

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhap had loitered in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy, with all his might o wonder.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day!" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!"

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-er!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. o and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, at I may give them the direction where to take Come back with the man, and I'll give you a illing. Come back with him in less than five inutes, and I'll give you half-a-crown!"

The boy was off like a shot. He must have d a steady hand at a trigger who could have t a shot off half so fast.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's!" whispered crooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a ugh. "He shan't know who sends it. It's vice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never ade such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be!"

The hand in which he wrote the address was t a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, d went downstairs to open the street door, ady for the coming of the poulterer's man. As e stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker aught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried crooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever oked at it before. What an honest expression has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker!—Here's the Turkey. Hallo! Whoop! How are ou! Merry Christmas!"

It *was* a Turkey! He could never have stood pon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped m short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-ax.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the turkey, and he chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and

the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaster over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, Sir! A Merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear Sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A Merry Christmas to you, Sir!"

"Mr. Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness"—here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were gone. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?"

"My dear Sir," said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don't know what to say to such munifi——"

"Don't say anything, please," retorted Scrooge. "Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

"I will!" cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

"Thank'ee," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!"

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon, he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he

had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

"Yes, Sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, Sir, along with mistress. I'll show you upstairs, if you please."

"Thank'ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I'll go in here, my dear."

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn't have done it, on any account.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when *he* came. So did the plump sister, when *she* came. So did every one when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh he was early there. If he could only be there

rst, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That as the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes he did! The clock struck ine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He as full eighteen minutes and a half behind his me. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that e might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his omforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; riving away with his pen, as if he were trying to vertake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed oice as near as he could feign it. "What do you nean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, Sir," said Bob. "I *am* ehind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I hink you are. Step this way, Sir, if you please."

"It's only once a year, Sir," pleaded Bob, ppearing from the Tank. "It shall not be reeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, Sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of hing any longer. And therefore," he continued, eaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig n the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again: "and therefore I am about to raise our salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it; holding him; and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-waistcoat.

"A Merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken,

as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!

THE CHIMES

A GOBLIN STORY

OF

OME BELLS THAT RANG AN OLD YEAR OUT
AND A NEW YEAR IN

vv 11

FIRST QUARTER

THERE are not many people—and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again—there are not, I say, many people who would care to sleep in a church. I don't mean at sermon-time in warm weather (when the thing has actually been done, once or twice), but in the night, and alone. A great multitude of persons will be violently astonished, I know, by this position, in the broad bold Day. But it applies to Night. It must be argued by night. And I will undertake to maintain it successfully on any gusty winter's night appointed for the purpose, with any one opponent chosen from the rest, who will meet me singly in an old churchyard, before an old church door; and will previously empower me to lock him in, if needful to his satisfaction, until morning.

For the night-wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of that sort, and moaning as it goes; and of trying, with its unseen hand, the windows and the doors; and seeking out

some crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in; as one not finding what it seeks, whatever that may be; it wails and howls to issue forth again: and not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars up to the roof, and strives to rend the rafters: then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls: seeming to read, in whispers, the Inscriptions sacred to the Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting. It has a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar; where it seems to chant, in its wild way, of Wrong and Murder done, and false Gods worshipped; in defiance of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire! It has an awful voice, that wind at Midnight, singing in a church!

But high up in the steeple! There the foul blast roars and whistles! High up in the steeple, where it is free to come and go through many an airy arch and loophole, and to twist and twine itself about the giddy stair, and twirl the groaning weathercock, and make the very tower shake and shiver! High up in the steeple, where the belfry is; and iron rails are ragged with rust; and sheets of lead and copper, shrivelled by the changing weather, crackle and heave beneath the unaccustomed tread; and birds stuff shabby nests into corners of old oaken joists and beams; and dust grows old and grey; and speckled spiders, indolent and fat with long security, swing idly to and fro in the vibration of the bells,

ıd never loose their hold upon their thread-spun ıstles in the air, or climb up sailor-like in quick arm, or drop upon the ground and ply a score of mble legs to save a life! High up in the steeple an old church, far above the light and murmur of ıe town and far below the flying clouds that shadow , is the wild and dreary place at night: and high ı in the steeple of an old church, dwelt the Chimes tell of.

They were old Chimes, trust me. Centuries ago, ıese Bells had been baptized by bishops: so many ·nturies ago, that the register of their baptism was st long, long before the memory of man: and no ıe knew their names. They had had their God-thers and Godmothers, these Bells (for my own ırt, by the way, I would rather incur the re-ıonsibility of being Godfather to a Bell than a oy): and had their silver mugs no doubt, besides. ut Time had mowed down their sponsors, and Henry the Eighth had melted down their mugs: ıd they now hung, nameless and mugless, in the ıurch tower.

Not speechless, though. Far from it. They ıd clear, loud, lusty, sounding voices, had these ells; and far and wide they might be heard upon e wind. Much too sturdy Chimes were they, to dependent on the pleasure of the wind, more-ıer; for, fighting gallantly against it when it took adverse whim, they would pour their cheerful tes into a listening ear right royally; and bent on eing heard, on stormy nights, by some poor mother atching a sick child, or some lone wife whose ısband was at sea, they had been sometimes known beat a blustering Nor'-Wester; ay, "all to fits," Toby Veck said; for though they chose to call

him Trotty Veck, his name was Toby, and nobody could make it anything else either (except Tobias without a special Act of Parliament; he having been as lawfully christened in his day as the Bells had been in theirs, though with not quite so much of solemnity or public rejoicing.

For my part, I confess myself of Toby Veck's belief, for I am sure he had opportunities enough of forming a correct one. And whatever Toby Veck said, I say. And I take my stand by Toby Veck although he *did* stand all day long (and weary work it was) just outside the church-door. In fact he was a ticket-porter, Toby Veck, and waited there for jobs.

And a breezy, goose-skinned, blue-nosed, red-eyed, stony-toed, tooth-chattering place it was, to wait in, in the winter-time, as Toby Veck well knew. The wind came tearing round the corner—especially the east wind—as if it had sallied forth, express from the confines of the earth, to have a blow at Toby. And oftentimes it seemed to come upon him sooner than it had expected, for bouncing round the corner, and passing Toby, it would suddenly wheel round again, as if it cried "Why, here he is!" Incontinently his little white apron would be caught up over his head like a naughty boy's garments, and his feeble little cane would be seen to wrestle and struggle unavailingly in his hand, and his legs would undergo tremendous agitation, and Toby himself all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that, would be so banged and buffeted, and touzled, and worried, and hustled, and lifted off his feet, as to render it a state of things but one degree removed from a positive miracle, that he wasn't carried up bodily into the air as a colony

frogs or snails or other very portable creatures metimes are, and rained down again, to the great tonishment of the natives, on some strange corner the world where ticket-porters are unknown.

But, windy weather, in spite of its using him so ughly, was, after all, a sort of holiday for Toby. hat's the fact. He didn't seem to wait so long r a sixpence in the wind, as at other times; the ving to fight with that boisterous element took off s attention, and quite freshened him up, when he as getting hungry and low-spirited. A hard frost o, or a fall of snow, was an Event; and it seemed do him good, somehow or other—it would have en hard to say in what respect though, Toby! o wind and frost and snow, and perhaps a good stiff orm of hail, were Toby Veck's red-letter days.

Wet weather was the worst: the cold, damp, ammy wet, that wrapped him up like a moist eat-coat: the only kind of great-coat Toby wned, or could have added to his comfort by spensing with. Wet days, when the rain came owly, thickly, obstinately down; when the reet's throat, like his own, was choked with ist; when smoking umbrellas passed and repassed, inning round and round like so many teetotums, they knocked against each other on the crowded otway, throwing off a little whirlpool of uncomtable sprinklings; when gutters brawled and terspouts were full and noisy; when the wet m the projecting stones and ledges of the church ll drip, drip, drip, on Toby, making the wisp of raw on which he stood mere mud in no time; ose were the days that tried him. Then indeed, ou might see Toby looking anxiously out from is shelter in an angle of the church wall—such a

meagre shelter that in summer time it never cast a shadow thicker than a good-sized walking stick upon the sunny pavement—with a disconsolate and lengthened face. But coming out, a minute afterwards, to warm himself by exercise: and trotting up and down some dozen times: he would brighten even then, and go back more brightly to his niche.

They called him Trotty from his pace, which meant speed if it didn't make it. He could have Walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot, and Toby would have taken to his bed and died. It bespattered him with mud in dirty weather; it cost him a world of trouble; he could have walked with infinitely greater ease; but that was one reason for his clinging to it so tenaciously. A weak, small, spare old man, he was a very Hercules, this Toby, in his good intentions. He loved to earn his money. He delighted to believe—Toby was very poor, and couldn't well afford to part with a delight—that he was worth his salt. With a shilling or an eighteen-penny message or small parcel in hand, his courage, always high, rose higher. As he trotted on, he would call out to fast Postmen ahead of him, to get out of the way; devoutly believing that in the natural course of things he must inevitably overtake and run them down; and he had perfect faith—not often tested—in his being able to carry anything that man could lift.

Thus, even when he came out of his nook to warm himself on a wet day, Toby trotted. Making, with his leaky shoes, a crooked line of slushy footprints in the mire; and blowing on his chilly hands and rubbing them against each other, poorly defended from the searching cold by threadbare mufflers of grey worsted, with a private

artment only for the thumb, and a common room tap for the rest of the fingers; Toby, with his nees bent and his cane beneath his arm, still otted. Falling out into the road to look up at e belfry when the Chimes resounded, Toby otted still.

He made this last excursion several times a day, r they were company to him; and when he heard eir voices, he had an interest in glancing at their dging-place, and thinking how they were moved, nd what hammers beat upon them. Perhaps he as the more curious about these Bells, because ere were points of resemblance between themlves and him. They hung there, in all weathers: ith the wind and rain driving in upon them: cing only the outsides of all those houses; never etting any nearer to the blazing fires that gleamed nd shone upon the windows, or came puffing out f the chimney tops; and incapable of participation any of the good things that were constantly eing handed, through the street doors and the ea railings, to prodigious cooks. Faces came nd went at many windows: sometimes pretty ces, youthful faces, pleasant faces: sometimes e reverse: but Toby knew no more (though he en speculated on these trifles, standing idle in e streets) whence they came, or where they ent, or whether, when the lips moved, one kind ord was said of him in all the year, than did the imes themselves.

Toby was not a casuist—that he knew of, at ast—and I don't mean to say that when he began take to the Bells, and to knit up his first rough cquaintance with them into something of a closer nd more delicate woof, he passed through these

considerations one by one, or held any formal review or great field-day in his thoughts. But what I mean to say, and do say is, that as the functions of Toby's body, his digestive organs for example, did of their own cunning, and by a great many operations of which he was altogether ignorant, and the knowledge of which would have astonished him very much, arrive at a certain end; so his mental faculties, without his privity or concurrence, set all these wheels and springs in motion, with a thousand others, when they worked to bring about his liking for the Bells.

And though I had said his love, I would not have recalled the word, though it would scarcely have expressed his complicated feeling. For, being but a simple man, he invested them with a strange and solemn character. They were so mysterious, often heard and never seen; so high up, so far off, so full of such a deep strong melody, that he regarded them with a species of awe; and sometimes when he looked up at the dark arched windows in the tower, he half expected to be beckoned to by something which was not a Bell, and yet was what he heard so often sounding in the Chimes. For all this, Toby scouted with indignation a certain flying rumour that the Chimes were haunted, as implying the possibility of their being connected with any Evil thing. In short, they were very often in his ears, and very often in his thoughts, but always in his good opinion; and he very often got such a crick in his neck by staring with his mouth wide open, at the steeple where they hung, that he was fain to take an extra trot or two, afterwards, to cure it.

The very thing he was in the act of doing one

ld day, when the last drowsy sound of Twelve clock, just struck, was humming like a melodious onster of a Bee, and not by any means a busy ee, all through the steeple!

"Dinner-time, eh!" said Toby, trotting up and own before the church. "Ah!"

Toby's nose was very red, and his eyelids were ery red, and he winked very much, and his houlders were very near his ears, and his legs ere very stiff; and altogether he was evidently a ng way upon the frosty side of cool.

"Dinner-time, eh!" repeated Toby, using his ght-hand muffler like an infantine boxing-glove, nd punishing his chest for being cold. "Ah--h-h!"

He took a silent trot, after that, for a minute or vo.

"There's nothing," said Toby, breaking forth resh,—but here he stopped short in his trot, and ith a face of great interest and some alarm, felt is nose carefully all the way up. It was but a ttle way (not being much of a nose) and he had on finished.

"I thought it was gone," said Toby, trotting ff again. "It's all right, however. I am sure couldn't blame it if it was to go. It has a ecious hard service of it in the bitter weather, d precious little to look forward to: for I don't ke snuff myself. It's a good deal tried, poor eetur, at the best of times; for when it *does* get old of a pleasant whiff or so (which an't too ften), it's generally from somebody else's dinner, -coming home from the baker's."

The reflection reminded him of that other eflection, which he had left unfinished.

"There's nothing," said Toby, "more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner. That's the great difference between 'em. It' took me a long time to find it out. I wonde whether it would be worth any gentleman's while now, to buy that obserwation for the Papers; o the Parliament!"

Toby was only joking, for he gravely shook his head in self-depreciation.

"Why! Lord!" said Toby. "The Papers is full of obserwations as it is; and so's the Parliament. Here's last week's paper, now;" taking a very dirty one from his pocket, and holding it from him at arm's length; "full of obserwations! Full of obserwations! I like to know the news as well as any man," said Toby, slowly; folding it a little smaller, and putting it in his pocket again: "but it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper now. It frightens me almost. I don't know what we poor people are coming to. Lord send we may be coming to something better in the New Year nigh upon us!"

"Why, father, father!" said a pleasant voice, hard by.

But Toby, not hearing it, continued to trot backwards and forwards: musing as he went, and talking to himself.

"It seems as if we can't go right, or do right, or be righted," said Toby. "I hadn't much schooling, myself, when I was young; and I can't make out whether we have any business on the face of the earth, or not. Sometimes I think we must have a little; and sometimes I think we must be intruding. I get so puzzled sometimes that I

ı not even able to make up my mind whether ere is any good at all in us, or whether we are rn bad. We seem to be dreadful things; we em to give a deal of trouble; we are always ing complained of and guarded against. One ıy or other, we fill the papers. Talk of a New ear!" said Toby, mournfully. "I can bear up well as another man at most times; better than good many, for I am as strong as a lion, and all en an't; but supposing it should really be that e have no right to a New Year—supposing we ally *are* intruding——"

"Why, father, father!" said the pleasant voice ain.

Toby heard it this time; started; stopped; ıd shortening his sight, which had been directed long way off as seeking for enlightenment in the ery heart of the approaching year, found himself ce to face with his own child, and looking close ıto her eyes.

Bright eyes they were. Eyes that would bear world of looking in, before their depth was thomed. Dark eyes, that reflected back the yes which searched them; not flashingly, or at ıe owner's will, but with a clear, calm, honest, atient radiance, claiming kindred with that light hich Heaven called into being. Eyes that were autiful and true, and beaming with Hope. With ope so young and fresh; with Hope so buoyant, gorous, and bright, despite the twenty years of ork and poverty on which they had looked; ıat they became a voice to Trotty Veck, and said: "I think we have some business here—a little!"

Trotty kissed the lips belonging to the eyes, and queezed the blooming face between his hands.

"Why, Pet," said Trotty. "What's to do? I didn't expect you to-day, Meg."

"Neither did I expect to come, father," cried the girl, nodding her head and smiling as she spoke. "But here I am! And not alone; not alone!"

"Why you don't mean to say," observed Trotty, looking curiously at a covered basket which she carried in her hand, "that you——"

"Smell it, father dear," said Meg. "Only smell it!"

Trotty was going to lift up the cover at once, in a great hurry, when she gaily interposed her hand.

"No, no, no," said Meg, with the glee of a child. "Lengthen it out a little. Let me just lift up the corner; just the lit-tle ti-ny cor-ner, you know," said Meg, suiting the action to the word with the utmost gentleness, and speaking very softly, as if she were afraid of being overheard by something inside the basket; "there. Now. What's that?"

Toby took the shortest possible sniff at the edge of the basket, and cried out in a rapture:

"Why, it's hot!"

"It's burning hot!" cried Meg. "Ha, ha, ha! It's scalding hot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Toby, with a sort of kick. "It's scalding hot!"

"But what is it, father?" said Meg. "Come! You haven't guessed what it is. And you must guess what it is. I can't think of taking it out, till you guess what it is. Don't be in such a hurry! Wait a minute! A little bit more of the cover. Now guess!"

Meg was in a perfect fright lest he should guess right too soon; shrinking away, as she held the

ket towards him; curling up her pretty shoulders; pping her ear with her hand, as if by so doing could keep the right word out of Toby's lips; l laughing softly the whole time.

Meanwhile Toby, putting a hand on each knee, nt down his nose to the basket, and took a long piration at the lid; the grin upon his withered e expanding in the process, as if he were aling laughing gas.

"Ah! It's very nice," said Toby. "It an't I suppose it an't Polonies?"

"No, no, no!" cried Meg, delighted. "Nothing e Polonies!"

"No," said Toby, after another sniff. "It's— s mellower than Polonies. It's very nice. It proves every moment. It's too decided for rotters. An't it?"

Meg was in an ecstasy. He could not have ne wider of the mark than Trotters — except olonies.

"Liver?" said Toby, communing with himself. No. There's a mildness about it that don't swer to liver. Pettitoes? No. It an't faint ough for pettitoes. It wants the stringiness of ocks' heads. And I know it an't sausages. I'll l you what it is. It's chitterlings!"

"No, it an't!" cried Meg, in a burst of delight. No, it an't!"

"Why, what am I a-thinking of!" said Toby, ldenly recovering a position as near the perpencular as it was possible for him to assume. "I all forget my own name next. It's tripe!"

Tripe it was; and Meg, in high joy, protested e should say, in half a minute more, it was the est tripe ever stewed.

"And so," said Meg, busying herself exultingl with the basket, "I'll lay the cloth at once, father for I have brought the tripe in a basin, and tied th basin up in a pocket-handkerchief; and if I like t be proud for once, and spread that for a cloth, an call it a cloth, there's no law to prevent me; i there, father?"

"Not that I know of, my dear," said Toby "But they're always a-bringing up some new lav or other."

"And according to what I was reading you i the paper the other day, father; what the Judg said, you know; we poor people are supposed t know them all. Ha, ha! What a mistake! My goodness me, how clever they think us!"

"Yes, my dear," cried Trotty; "and they'd be very fond of any one of us that *did* know 'em all. He'd grow fat upon the work he'd get, that man, and be popular with the gentlefolks in his neighbourhood. Very much so!"

"He'd eat his dinner with an appetite, whoever he was, if it smelt like this," said Meg, cheerfully. "Make haste, for there's a hot potato besides, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle. Where will you dine, father? On the Post, or on the Steps? Dear, dear, how grand we are. Two places to choose from!"

"The Steps to-day, my Pet," said Trotty. "Steps in dry weather. Post in wet. There's a greater conveniency in the Steps at all times, because of the sitting down; but they're rheumatic in the damp."

"Then here," said Meg, clapping her hands, after a moment's bustle; "here it is, all ready! And beautiful it looks! Come, father. Come!"

Since his discovery of the contents of the basket, otty had been standing looking at her—and had en speaking too—in an abstracted manner, which owed that though she was the object of his oughts and eyes, to the exclusion even of tripe, neither saw nor thought about her as she was at t moment, but had before him some imaginary igh sketch or drama of her future life. Roused, w, by her cheerful summons, he shook off a elancholy shake of the head which was just ming upon him, and trotted to her side. As he s stooping to sit down, the Chimes rang.

"Amen!" said Trotty, pulling off his hat and oking up towards them.

"Amen to the Bells, father?" cried Meg.

"They broke in like a grace, my dear," said rotty, taking his seat. "They'd say a good one, am sure, if they could. Many's the kind thing ey say to me."

"The Bells do, father!" laughed Meg, as she t the basin, and a knife and fork, before him. Well!"

"Seem to, my Pet," said Trotty, falling to ith great vigour. "And where's the difference? I hear 'em, what does it matter whether they eak it or not? Why bless you, my dear," said oby, pointing at the tower with his fork, and coming more animated under the influence of nner, "how often have I heard them bells say, 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart oby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good eart Toby!' A million times? More!"

"Well, I never!" cried Meg.

She had, though—over and over again. For it as Toby's constant topic.

"When things is very bad," said Trotty; "very bad indeed, I mean; almost at the worst; then it 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby! That way."

"And it comes — at last, father," said Meg with a touch of sadness in her pleasant voice.

"Always," answered the unconscious Toby "Never fails."

While this discourse was holding, Trotty made no pause in his attack upon the savoury meat before him, but cut and ate, and cut and drank, and cut and chewed, and dodged about, from tripe to hot potato, and from hot potato back again to tripe with an unctuous and unflagging relish. But happening now to look all round the street — in case anybody should be beckoning from any door or window, for a porter—his eyes, in coming back again, encountered Meg: sitting opposite to him with her arms folded: and only busy in watching his progress with a smile of happiness.

"Why, Lord forgive me!" said Trotty, dropping his knife and fork. "My dove! Meg why didn't you tell me what a beast I was?"

"Father?"

"Sitting here," said Trotty, in penitent explanation, "cramming, and stuffing, and gorging myself; and you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast, nor wanting to, when——"

"But I have broken it, father," interposed his daughter, laughing, "all to bits. I have had my dinner."

"Nonsense," said Trotty. "Two dinners in one day! It an't possible! You might as well tell me that two New Year's Days will come

ether, or that I have had a gold head all my life, l never changed it."

"I have had my dinner, father, for all that," d Meg, coming nearer to him. "And if you'll on with yours, I'll tell you how and where; l how your dinner came to be brought; and— l something else besides."

Toby still appeared incredulous; but she looked o his face with her clear eyes, and laying her nd upon his shoulder, motioned him to go on ile the meat was hot. So Trotty took up his ife and fork again, and went to work. But much re slowly than before, and shaking his head, as he were not at all pleased with himself.

"I had my dinner, father," said Meg, after a le hesitation, "with — with Richard. His nner-time was early; and as he brought his nner with him when he came to see me, we—we d it together, father."

Trotty took a little beer, and smacked his lips. hen he said "Oh!"—because she waited.

"And Richard says, father——" Meg re- ned. Then stopped.

"What does Richard say, Meg?" asked Toby.

"Richard says, father——" Another stoppage.

"Richard's a long time saying it," said Toby.

"He says then, father," Meg continued, lifting her eyes at last, and speaking in a tremble, but te plainly; "another year is nearly gone, and ere is the use of waiting on from year to year, hen it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off an we are now? He says we are poor now, her, and we shall be poor then; but we are ung now, and years will make us old before we now it. He says that if we wait: people in our

condition: until we see our way quite clearly, th way will be a narrow one indeed — the commo way—the Grave, father."

A bolder man than Trotty Veck must needs hav drawn upon his boldness largely, to deny it. Trott held his peace.

"And how hard, father, to grow old, and die and think we might have cheered and helped eac other! How hard in all our lives to love eac other; and to grieve, apart, to see each othe working, changing, growing old and grey. Eve if I got the better of it, and forgot him (which never could), oh father dear, how hard to have heart so full as mine is now, and live to have slowly drained out every drop, without the recollection of one happy moment of a woman's life, t stay behind and comfort me, and make me better!"

Trotty sat quite still. Meg dried her eyes, and said more gaily: that is to say, with here a laugh, and there a sob, and here a laugh and sob together:

"So Richard says, father; as his work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love him and have loved him full three years—ah! longer than that, if he knew it!—will I marry him on New Year's Day; the best and happiest day, he says, in the whole year, and one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it. It's a short notice, father—isn't it?—but I haven't my fortune to be settled, or my wedding dresses to be made, like the great ladies, father—have I? And he said so much, and said it in his way; so strong and earnest, and all the time so kind and gentle; that I said I'd come and talk to you, father. And as they paid the money for that work of mine this morning (unexpectedly, I am sure!), and as you

ve fared very poorly for a whole week, and as I uldn't help wishing there should be something to ke this day a sort of holiday to you as well as lear and happy day to me, father, I made a little at and brought it to surprise you."

"And see how he leaves it cooling on the step!" d another voice.

It was the voice of this same Richard, who had me upon them unobserved, and stood before the her and daughter: looking down upon them with ace as glowing as the iron on which his stout dge-hammer daily rung. A handsome, well-de, powerful youngster he was; with eyes that rkled like the red-hot droppings from a furnace ; black hair that curled about his swarthy nples rarely; and a smile—a smile that bore out g's eulogium on his style of conversation.

"See how he leaves it cooling on the step!" d Richard. "Meg don't know what he likes. t she!"

Trotty, all action and enthusiasm, immediately ched up his hand to Richard, and was going to lress him in a great hurry, when the house-door ned without any warning, and a footman very rly put his foot in the tripe.

"Out of the vays here, will you! You must ays go and be a-settin' on our steps, must you! u can't go and give a turn to none of the neigh-rs never, can't you! *Will* you clear the road, won't you?"

Strictly speaking, the last question was irrelevant, hey had already done it.

"What's the matter, what's the matter!" said gentleman for whom the door was opened: ning out of the house at that kind of light-heavy

pace—that peculiar compromise between a walk and a jog-trot—with which a gentleman upon the smooth down-hill of life, wearing creaking boots, a watch-chain, and clean linen, *may* come out of his house: not only without any abatement of his dignity, but with an expression of having important and wealthy engagements elsewhere. "What's the matter! What's the matter!"

"You're always a-being begged, and prayed, upon your bended knees you are," said the footman with great emphasis to Trotty Veck, "to let our door-steps be. Why don't you let 'em be? CAN'T you let 'em be?"

"There! That'll do, that'll do!" said the gentleman. "Halloa there! Porter!" beckoning with his head to Trotty Veck. "Come here. What's that? Your dinner?"

"Yes, Sir," said Trotty, leaving it behind him in a corner.

"Don't leave it there," exclaimed the gentleman. "Bring it here, bring it here. So! This is your dinner, is it?"

"Yes, Sir," repeated Trotty, looking, with a fixed eye and a watery mouth, at the piece of tripe he had reserved for a last delicious tit-bit; which the gentleman was now turning over and over on the end of the fork.

Two other gentlemen had come out with him. One was a low-spirited gentleman of middle age, of a meagre habit, and a disconsolate face; who kept his hands continually in the pockets of his scanty pepper-and-salt trousers, very large and dog's-eared from that custom; and was not particularly well brushed or washed. The other, a full-sized, sleek, well-conditioned gentleman, in a blue coat with

ght buttons, and a white cravat. This gentleman d a very red face, as if an undue proportion of e blood in his body were squeezed up into his ad; which perhaps accounted for his having also e appearance of being rather cold about the heart.

He who had Toby's meat upon the fork, called the first one by the name of Filer; and they th drew near together. Mr. Filer being exedingly short-sighted, was obliged to go so close the remnant of Toby's dinner before he could ake out what it was, that Toby's heart leaped up o his mouth. But Mr. Filer didn't eat it.

"This is a description of animal food, Alderan," said Filer, making little punches in it, with pencil-case, "commonly known to the labouring pulation of this country, by the name of tripe."

The Alderman laughed, and winked; for he s a merry fellow, Alderman Cute. Oh, and a fellow too! A knowing fellow. Up to everyng. Not to be imposed upon. Deep in the ople's hearts! He knew them, Cute did. I lieve you!

"But who eats tripe?" said Mr. Filer, looking ind. "Tripe is without an exception the least onomical, and the most wasteful article of connption that the markets of this country can by ssibility produce. The loss upon a pound of pe has been found to be, in the boiling, sevenths of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound any other animal substance whatever. Tripe is re expensive, properly understood, than the hotuse pine-apple. Taking into account the number animals slaughtered yearly within the bills of rtality alone; and forming a low estimate of the antity of tripe which the carcases of those animals,

reasonably well butchered, would yield; I find that the waste on that amount of tripe, if boiled, would victual a garrison of five hundred men for five months of thirty-one days each, and a February over. The Waste, the Waste!"

Trotty stood aghast, and his legs shook under him. He seemed to have starved a garrison of five hundred men with his own hand.

"Who eats tripe?" said Mr. Filer, warmly. "Who eats tripe?"

Trotty made a miserable bow.

"You do, do you?" said Mr. Filer. "Then I'll tell you something. You snatch your tripe, my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans."

"I hope not, Sir," said Trotty, faintly. "I'd sooner die of want!"

"Divide the amount of tripe before mentioned, Alderman," said Mr. Filer, "by the estimated number of existing widows and orphans, and the result will be one pennyweight of tripe to each. Not a grain is left for that man. Consequently, he's a robber."

Trotty was so shocked, that it gave him no concern to see the Alderman finish the tripe himself. It was a relief to get rid of it, anyhow.

"And what do you say?" asked the Alderman, jocosely, of the red-faced gentleman in the blue coat. "You have heard friend Filer. What do *you* say?"

"What's it possible to say?" returned the gentleman. "What *is* to be said? Who can take any interest in a fellow like this," meaning Trotty; "in such degenerate times as these? Look at him! What an object! The good old

times, the grand old times, the great old times! *Those* were the times for a bold peasantry, and all that sort of thing. Those were the times for every sort of thing, in fact. There's nothing now-a-days. Ah!" sighed the red-faced gentleman. "The good old times, the good old times!"

The gentleman didn't specify what particular times he alluded to; nor did he say whether he objected to the present times, from a disinterested consciousness that they had done nothing very remarkable in producing himself.

"The good old times, the good old times," repeated the gentleman. "What times they were! They were the only times. It's of no use talking about any other times, or discussing what the people are in these times. You don't call these, times, do you? I don't. Look into Strutt's Costumes, and see what a Porter used to be, in any of the good old English reigns."

"He hadn't, in his very best circumstances, a shirt to his back, or a stocking to his foot; and there was scarcely a vegetable in all England for him to put into his mouth," said Mr. Filer. "I can prove it, by tables."

But still the red-faced gentleman extolled the good old times, the grand old times, the great old times. No matter what anybody else said, he still went turning round and round in one set form of words concerning them; as a poor squirrel turns and turns in its revolving cage; touching the mechanism, and trick of which, it has probably quite as distinct perceptions, as ever this red-faced gentleman had of his deceased Millennium.

It is possible that poor old Trotty's faith in these very vague Old Times was not entirely

destroyed, for he felt vague enough, at that moment. One thing, however, was plain to him in the midst of his distress; to wit, that however these gentlemen might differ in details, his misgivings of that morning, and of many other mornings, were well founded. "No, no. We can't go right or do right," thought Trotty in despair. "There is no good in us. We are born bad!"

But Trotty had a father's heart within him which had somehow got into his breast in spite of this decree; and he could not bear that Meg, in the blush of her brief joy, should have her fortune read by these wise gentlemen. "God help her," thought poor Trotty. "She will know it soon enough."

He anxiously signed, therefore, to the young smith, to take her away. But he was so busy talking to her softly at a little distance, that he only became conscious of this desire, simultaneously with Alderman Cute. Now, the Alderman had not yet had his say, but *he* was a philosopher, too—practical, though! Oh, very practical!—and, as he had no idea of losing any portion of his audience, he cried "Stop!"

"Now, you know," said the Alderman, addressing his two friends, with a self-complacent smile upon his face which was habitual to him, "I am a plain man, and a practical man; and I go to work in a plain practical way. That's my way. There is not the least mystery or difficulty in dealing with this sort of people if you only understand 'em, and can talk to 'em in their own manner. Now, you Porter! Don't you ever tell me, or anybody else, my friend, that you haven't always enough to eat, and of the best; because I know better. I have

asted your tripe, you know, and you can't 'chaff' me. You understand what 'chaff' means, eh? That's the right word, isn't it? Ha, ha, ha! Lord bless you," said the Alderman, turning to his friends again, "it's the easiest thing on earth to deal with this sort of people, if you understand them."

Famous man for the common people, Alderman Cute! Never out of temper with them! Easy, affable, joking, knowing gentleman!

"You see, my friend," pursued the Alderman, "there's a great deal of nonsense talked about Want—'hard up,' you know: that's the phrase, isn't it? ha! ha! ha!—and I intend to Put it Down. There's a certain amount of cant in vogue about Starvation, and I mean to Put it Down. That's all! Lord bless you," said the Alderman, turning to his friends again, "you may Put Down anything among this sort of people, if you only know the way to set about it!"

Trotty took Meg's hand and drew it through his arm. He didn't seem to know what he was doing though.

"Your daughter, eh?" said the Alderman, chucking her familiarly under the chin.

Always affable with the working classes, Alderman Cute! Knew what pleased them! Not a bit of pride!

"Where's her mother?" asked that worthy gentleman.

"Dead," said Toby. "Her mother got up linen; and was called to Heaven when She was born."

"Not to get up linen *there*, I suppose," remarked the Alderman pleasantly.

Toby might or might not have been able to separate his wife in Heaven from her old pursuits. But query: If Mrs. Alderman Cute had gone to Heaven, would Mr. Alderman Cute have pictured her as holding any state or station there?

"And you're making love to her, are you?" said Cute to the young smith.

"Yes," returned Richard quickly, for he was nettled by the question. "And we are going to be married on New Year's Day."

"What do you mean!" cried Filer sharply. "Married!"

"Why, yes, we're thinking of it, Master," said Richard. "We're rather in a hurry, you see, in case it should be Put Down first."

"Ah!" cried Filer, with a groan. "Put *that* down indeed, Alderman, and you'll do something. Married! Married!! The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people; their improvidence; their wickedness; is, by Heavens! enough to—Now look at that couple, will you!"

Well! They were worth looking at. And marriage seemed as reasonable and fair a deed as they need have in contemplation.

"A man may live to be as old as Methusaleh," said Mr. Filer, "and may labour all his life for the benefit of such people as those; and may heap up facts on figures, facts on figures, facts on figures, mountains high and dry; and he can no more hope to persuade 'em that they have no right or business to be married, than he can hope to persuade 'em that they have no earthly right or business to be born. And *that* we know they haven't. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty long ago."

Alderman Cute was mightily diverted, and laid his right forefinger on the side of his nose, as much as to say to both his friends, "Observe me, will you! Keep your eye on the practical man!"—and called Meg to him.

"Come here, my girl!" said Alderman Cute.

The young blood of her lover had been mounting, wrathfully, within the last few minutes; and he was indisposed to let her come. But, setting a constraint upon himself, he came forward with a stride as Meg approached, and stood beside her. Trotty kept her hand within his arm still, but looked from face to face as wildly as a sleeper in a dream.

"Now, I'm going to give you a word or two of good advice, my girl," said the Alderman, in his nice easy way. "It's my place to give advice, you know, because I'm a Justice. You know I'm a Justice, don't you?"

Meg timidly said, "Yes." But everybody knew Alderman Cute was a Justice! Oh dear, so active a Justice always! Who such a mote of brightness in the public eye, as Cute!

"You are going to be married, you say," pursued the Alderman. "Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex! But never mind that. After you are married, you'll quarrel with your husband, and come to be a distressed wife. You may think not: but you will, because I tell you so. Now I give you fair warning, that I have made up my mind to Put distressed wives Down. So, don't be brought before me. You'll have children—boys. Those boys will grow up bad of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I'll convict 'em sum-

marily, every one, for I am determined to Pu boys without shoes and stockings, Down. Perhap your husband will die young (most likely) an leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned ou of doors, and wander up and down the streets Now, don't wander near me, my dear, for I ar resolved to Put all wandering mothers Down All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's m determination to Put Down. Don't think to plea illness as an excuse with me; or babies as a excuse with me; for all sick persons and youn children (I hope you know the Church Service but I'm afraid not) I am determined to Put Down And if you attempt, desperately, and ungratefully and impiously, and fraudulently attempt, to drow yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity on you for I have made up my mind to Put all suicid Down. If there is one thing," said the Alderman, with his self-satisfied smile, "on which I can be said to have made up my mind more tha on another, it is to Put suicide Down. So don' try it on. That's the phrase, isn't it! Ha, ha now we understand each other."

Toby knew not whether to be agonised or glad to see that Meg had turned a deadly white, and dropped her lover's hand.

"As for you, you dull dog," said the Alderman, turning with even increased cheerfulness and urbanity to the young smith, "what are you thinking of being married for? What do you want to be married for, you silly fellow! If I was a fine, young, strapping chap like you, I should be ashamed of being milksop enough to pin myself to a woman's apron-strings! Why, she'll be an old woman before you're a middle-aged man!

nd a pretty figure you'll cut then, with a draggle-iled wife and a crowd of squalling children crying ter you wherever you go!"

O, he knew how to banter the common people, lderman Cute!

"There! Go along with you," said the lderman, "and repent. Don't make such a fool f yourself as to get married on New Year's Day. ou'll think very differently of it long before next Jew Year's Day; a trim young fellow like you, vith all the girls looking after you. There! Go long with you!"

They went along. Not arm in arm, or hand in and, or interchanging bright glances: but she in ears, he gloomy and down-looking. Were these ne hearts that had so lately made old Toby's leap p from its faintness? No, no. The Alderman a blessing on his head!) had Put *them* Down.

"As you happen to be here," said the Alderman o Toby, "you shall carry a letter for me. Can ou be quick? You're an old man."

Toby, who had been looking after Meg, quite tupidly, made shift to murmur out that he was very uick, and very strong.

"How old are you?" inquired the Alderman.

"I'm over sixty, Sir," said Toby.

"O! This man's a great deal past the average ge, you know," cried Mr. Filer, breaking in as his patience would bear some trying, but this eally was carrying matters a little too far.

"I feel I'm intruding, Sir," said Toby. "I—I misdoubted it this morning. Oh dear me!"

The Alderman cut him short by giving him the letter from his pocket. Toby would have got a shilling too; but Mr. Filer clearly showing that

in that case he would rob a certain given numb of persons of ninepence-halfpenny a-piece, he on got sixpence; and thought himself very well off get that.

Then the Alderman gave an arm to each of h friends, and walked off in high feather; but h immediately came hurrying back alone, as if he ha forgotten something.

"Porter!" said the Alderman.

"Sir!" said Toby.

"Take care of that daughter of yours. She much too handsome."

"Even her good looks are stolen from somebod or other I suppose," thought Toby, looking at th sixpence in his hand, and thinking of the trip "She's been and robbed five hundred ladies c a bloom a-piece, I shouldn't wonder. It's ver dreadful!"

"She's much too handsome, my man," repeate the Alderman. "The chances are, that she' come to no good, I clearly see. Observe what say. Take care of her!" With which, h hurried off again.

"Wrong every way. Wrong every way!" said Trotty, clasping his hands. "Born bad No business here!"

The Chimes came clashing in upon him as h said the words. Full, loud, and sounding—bu with no encouragement. No, not a drop.

"The tune's changed," cried the old man, a he listened. "There's not a word of all tha fancy in it. Why should there be? I have n business with the New Year nor with the old on neither. Let me die!"

Still the Bells, pealing forth their changes, mad

e very air spin. Put 'em down, Put 'em down! ood old Times, Good old Times! Facts and gures, Facts and Figures! Put 'em down, Put n down! If they said anything they said this, l the brain of Toby reeled.

He pressed his bewildered head between his nds, as if to keep it from splitting asunder. A ell-timed action, as it happened; for finding the ter in one of them, and being by that means minded of his charge, he fell, mechanically, into s usual trot, and trotted off.

SECOND QUARTER

THE letter Toby had received from Alderman Cute, was addressed to a great man in the great district of the town. The greatest district of the town. It must have been the greatest district of the town, because it was commonly called The World by its inhabitants.

The letter positively seemed heavier in Toby's hand, than another letter. Not because the Alderman had sealed it with a very large coat of arms and no end of wax, but because of the weighty name on the superscription, and the ponderous amount of gold and silver with which it was associated.

"How different from us!" thought Toby, in all simplicity and earnestness, as he looked at the direction. "Divide the lively turtles in the bills of mortality, by the number of gentlefolks able to buy 'em; and whose share does he take but his own! As to snatching tripe from anybody's mouth—he'd scorn it!"

With the involuntary homage due to such an exalted character, Toby interposed a corner of his apron between the letter and his fingers.

"His children," said Trotty, and a mist rose before his eyes; "his daughters—Gentlemen may win their hearts and marry them; they may be

ppy wives and mothers; they may be handsome
:e my darling M—e—"

He couldn't finish the name. The final letter
'elled in his throat, to the size of the whole
ɔhabet.

"Never mind," thought Trotty. "I know
hat I mean. That's more than enough for me."
nd with this consolatory rumination, trotted on.

It was a hard frost, that day. The air was
acing, crisp, and clear. The wintry sun, though
ɔwerless for warmth, looked brightly down upon
e ice it was too weak to melt, and set a radiant
ory there. At other times, Trotty might have
arned a poor man's lesson from the wintry sun;
ıt he was past that now.

The Year was Old that day. The patient
ear had lived through the reproaches and misuses
f its slanderers, and faithfully performed its work.
pring, summer, autumn, winter. It had laboured
ırough the destined round, and now laid down its
eary head to die. Shut out from hope, high
ınpulse, active happiness, itself, but active
ıessenger of many joys to others, it made appeal
ı its decline to have its toiling days and patient
ours remembered, and to die in peace. Trotty
ıght have read a poor man's allegory in the
ding year; but he was past that now.

And only he? Or has the like appeal been
ver made, by seventy years at once upon an
ınglish labourer's head, and made in vain!

The streets were full of motion, and the shops
vere decked out gaily. The New Year, like an
nfant Heir to the whole world, was waited for,
vith welcomes, presents, and rejoicings. There
vere books and toys for the New Year, glittering

trinkets for the New Year, dresses for the New Year, schemes of fortune for the New Year; new inventions to beguile it. Its life was parcelled out in almanacks and pocket-books; the coming of its moons, and stars, and tides, was known beforehand to the moment; all the workings of its seasons in their days and nights, were calculated with as much precision as Mr. Filer could work sums in men and women.

The New Year, the New Year. Everywhere the New Year! The Old Year was already looked upon as dead; and its effects were selling cheap, like some drowned mariner's aboard ship. Its patterns were Last Year's and going at a sacrifice, before its breath was gone. Its treasures were mere dirt, beside the riches of its unborn successor!

Trotty had no portion, to his thinking, in the New Year or the Old.

"Put 'em down, Put 'em down! Facts and Figures, Facts and Figures! Good old Times, Good old Times! Put 'em down, Put 'em down!"—his trot went to that measure, and would fit itself to nothing else.

But even that one, melancholy as it was, brought him, in due time, to the end of his journey. To the mansion of Sir Joseph Bowley, Member of Parliament.

The door was opened by a Porter. Such a Porter! Not of Toby's order. Quite another thing. His place was the ticket though; not Toby's.

This Porter underwent some hard panting before he could speak; having breathed himself by coming incautiously out of his chair, without first taking time to think about it and compose his mind.

/hen he had found his voice—which it took him ome time to do, for it was a long way off, and dden under a load of meat—he said in a fat hisper,

"Who's it from?"

Toby told him.

"You're to take it in, yourself," said the Porter, ointing to a room at the end of a long passage, pening from the hall. "Everything goes straight , on this day of the year. You're not a bit too oon, for the carriage is at the door now, and they ave only come to town for a couple of hours, a' urpose."

Toby wiped his feet (which were quite dry ready) with great care, and took the way pointed ut to him; observing as he went that it was an vfully grand house, but hushed and covered up, as the family were in the country. Knocking at the oom door, he was told to enter from within; and oing so found himself in a spacious library, where, a table strewn with files and papers, were a stately dy in a bonnet; and a not very stately gentleman black who wrote from her dictation; while other, and an older, and a much statelier gentlean, whose hat and cane were on the table, walked and down, with one hand in his breast, and oked complacently from time to time at his own cture—a full length; a very full length—hanging er the fireplace.

"What is this?" said the last-named gentlean. "Mr. Fish, will you have the goodness to tend?"

Mr. Fish begged pardon, and taking the letter om Toby, handed it, with great respect.

"From Alderman Cute, Sir Joseph."

"Is this all? Have you nothing else, Porter?" inquired Sir Joseph.

Toby replied in the negative.

"You have no bill or demand upon me; my name is Bowley, Sir Joseph Bowley; of any kind from anybody, have you?" said Sir Joseph. "If you have, present it. There is a cheque-book by the side of Mr. Fish. I allow nothing to be carried into the New Year. Every description of account is settled in this house at the close of the old one. So that if death was to—to——"

"To cut," suggested Mr. Fish.

"To sever, Sir," returned Sir Joseph, with great asperity, "the cord of existence—my affairs would be found, I hope, in a state of preparation."

"My dear Sir Joseph!" said the lady, who was greatly younger than the gentleman. "How shocking!"

"My Lady Bowley," returned Sir Joseph, floundering now and then, as in the great depth of his observations, "at this season of the year we should think of—of—ourselves. We should look into our—our accounts. We should feel that every return of so eventful a period in human transactions involves matters of deep moment between a man and his—and his banker."

Sir Joseph delivered these words as if he felt the full morality of what he was saying; and desired that even Trotty should have an opportunity of being improved by such discourse. Possibly he had this end before him in still forbearing to break the seal of the letter, and in telling Trotty to wait where he was, a minute.

"You were desiring Mr. Fish to say, my lady——" observed Sir Joseph.

"Mr. Fish has said that, I believe," returned his ıdy, glancing at the letter. "But, upon my word, ir Joseph, I don't think I can let it go after all. t is so very dear."

"What is dear?" inquired Sir Joseph.

"That Charity, my love. They only allow two otes for a subscription of five pounds. Really ıonstrous!"

"My Lady Bowley," returned Sir Joseph, "you ırprise me. Is the luxury of feeling in proportion the number of votes; or is it, to a rightly conituted mind, in proportion to the number of appliants, and the wholesome state of mind to which ıeir canvassing reduces them? Is there no exitement of the purest kind in having two votes dispose of among fifty people?"

"Not to me, I acknowledge," replied the lady. It bores one. Besides, one can't oblige one's cquaintance. But you are the Poor Man's Friend, ou know, Sir Joseph. You think otherwise."

"I *am* the Poor Man's Friend," observed Sir oseph, glancing at the poor man present. "As ıch I may be taunted. As such I have been ıunted. But I ask no other title."

"Bless him for a noble gentleman!" thought rotty.

"I don't agree with Cute here, for instance," id Sir Joseph, holding out the letter. "I don't ree with the Filer party. I don't agree with any rty. My friend the Poor Man, has no business vith anything of that sort, and nothing of that sort ıas any business with him. My friend the Poor Man, in my district, is my business. No man or ody of men has any right to interfere between my riend and me. That is the ground I take. I

assume a—a paternal character towards my friend I say, 'My good fellow, I will treat you paternally.'"

Toby listened with great gravity, and began to feel more comfortable.

"Your only business, my good fellow," pursued Sir Joseph, looking abstractedly at Toby; "your only business in life is with me. You needn't trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for you; I know what is good for you; I am your perpetual parent. Such is the dispensation of an all-wise Providence! Now, the design of your creation is: not that you should swill, and guzzle, and associate your enjoyments, brutally, with food'—Toby thought remorsefully of the tripe—"but that you should feel the Dignity of Labour; go forth erect into the cheerful morning air, and—and stop there. Live hard and temperately, be respectful, exercise your self-denial, bring up your family on next to nothing, pay your rent as regularly as the clock strikes, be punctual in your dealings (I set you a good example; you will find Mr. Fish, my confidential secretary, with a cash-box before him at all times); and you may trust me to be your Friend and Father."

"Nice children, indeed, Sir Joseph!" said the lady, with a shudder. "Rheumatisms, and fevers, and crooked legs, and asthmas, and all kinds of horrors!"

"My lady," returned Sir Joseph, with solemnity, "not the less am I the Poor Man's Friend and Father. Not the less shall he receive encouragement at my hands. Every quarter-day he will be put in communication with Mr. Fish. Every New Year's Day, myself and friends will drink his health.

)nce every year, myself and friends will address him ·ith the deepest feeling. Once in his life, he may ven perhaps receive; in public, in the presence of ıe gentry; a Trifle from a Friend. And when, pheld no more by these stimulants, and the Dig- ity of Labour, he sinks into his comfortable grave, ıen my lady"—here Sir Joseph blew his nose—"I will be a Friend and Father—on the same erms—to his children."

Toby was greatly moved.

"Oh! You have a thankful family, Sir Joseph!" ried his wife.

"My lady," said Sir Joseph, quite majestically, "Ingratitude is known to be the sin of that class. expect no other return."

"Ah! Born bad!" thought Toby. "Nothing ıelts us."

"What man can do, *I* do," pursued Sir Joseph. "I do my duty as the Poor Man's Friend and 'ather; and I endeavour to educate his mind, by ıculcating on all occasions the one great moral esson which that class requires. That is, entire)ependence on myself. They have no business vhatever with—with themselves. If wicked and lesigning persons tell them otherwise, and they ecome impatient and discontented, and are guilty f insubordinate conduct and black-hearted ingrati- ıde; which is undoubtedly the case; I am their 'riend and Father still. It is so Ordained. It is the nature of things."

With that great sentiment, he opened the Alder- nan's letter; and read it.

"Very polite and attentive, I am sure!" ex- laimed Sir Joseph. "My lady, the Alderman is so ›bliging as to remind me that he has had 'the

distinguished honour'—he is very good—of meeting me at the house of our mutual friend Deedles the banker; and he does me the favour to inquire whether it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down."

"*Most* agreeable!" replied my Lady Bowley. "The worst man among them! He has been committing a robbery, I hope?"

"Why no," said Sir Joseph, referring to the letter. "Not quite. Very near. Not quite. He came up to London, it seems, to look for employment (trying to better himself—that's his story), and being found at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody and carried next morning before the Alderman. The Alderman observes (very properly) that he is determined to put this sort of thing down; and that if it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down, he will be happy to begin with him."

"Let him be made an example of, by all means," returned the lady. "Last winter, when I introduced pinking and eyelet-holing among the men and boys in the village, as a nice evening employment, and had the lines,

> O let us love our occupations,
> Bless the squire and his relations,
> Live upon our daily rations,
> And always know our proper stations,

set to music on the new system, for them to sing the while; this very Fern—I see him now—touched that hat of his, and said, 'I humbly ask your pardon, my lady, but *an't* I something different from a great girl?' I expected it, of course; who can expect anything but insolence and ingratitude from that

lass of people! That is not to the purpose, owever. Sir Joseph! Make an example of im!"

"Hem!" coughed Sir Joseph. "Mr. Fish, f you'll have the goodness to attend——"

Mr. Fish immediately seized his pen, and wrote rom Sir Joseph's dictation.

"Private. My dear Sir. I am very much inebted to you for your courtesy in the matter of the nan William Fern, of whom, I regret to add, I an say nothing favourable. I have uniformly conidered myself in the light of his Friend and Father, ut have been repaid (a common case I grieve to ay) with ingratitude, and constant opposition to my lans. He is a turbulent and rebellious spirit. His haracter will not bear investigation. Nothing will ersuade him to be happy when he might. Under hese circumstances, it appears to me, I own, that vhen he comes before you again (as you informed ne he promised to do to-morrow, pending your nquiries, and I think he may be so far relied upon), is committal for some short term as a Vagabond, vould be a service to society, and would be a salutary xample in a country where—for the sake of those vho are, through good and evil report, the Friends nd Fathers of the Poor, as well as with a view to hat, generally speaking, misguided class themselves —examples are greatly needed. And I am," and o forth.

"It appears," remarked Sir Joseph when he had igned this letter, and Mr. Fish was sealing it, "as if this were Ordained: really. At the close of the year, I wind up my account and strike my balance, even with William Fern!"

Trotty, who had long ago relapsed, and was very

low-spirited, stepped forward with a rueful face t take the letter.

"With my compliments and thanks," said Si Joseph. "Stop!"

"Stop!" echoed Mr. Fish.

"You have heard, perhaps," said Sir Joseph oracularly, "certain remarks into which I hav been led respecting the solemn period of time a which we have arrived, and the duty impose upon us of settling our affairs, and being prepared You have observed that I don't shelter mysel behind my superior standing in society, but tha Mr. Fish—that gentleman—has a cheque-book a his elbow, and is in fact here, to enable me to turn over a perfectly new leaf, and enter on the epoch before us with a clean account. Now my friend, can you lay your hand upon your heart, and say that you also have made preparations for a New Year?"

"I am afraid, Sir," stammered Trotty, looking meekly at him, "that I am a—a—little behindhand with the world."

"Behindhand with the world!" repeated Sir Joseph Bowley, in a tone of terrible distinctness.

"I am afraid, Sir," faltered Trotty, "that there's a matter of ten or twelve shillings owing to Mrs. Chickenstalker."

"To Mrs. Chickenstalker!" repeated Sir Joseph, in the same tone as before.

"A shop, Sir," exclaimed Toby, "in the general line. Also a—a little money on account of rent. A very little, Sir. It oughtn't to be owing, I know, but we have been hard put to it, indeed!"

Sir Joseph looked at his lady, and at Mr. Fish, and at Trotty, one after another, twice all round.

He then made a despondent gesture with both hands once, as if he gave the thing up altogether.

"How a man, even among this improvident and impracticable race; an old man; a man grown grey; can look a New Year in the face, with his affairs in this condition; how he can lie down on his bed at night, and get up again in the morning, and— There!" he said, turning his back on Trotty. "Take the letter. Take the letter!"

"I heartily wish it was otherwise, Sir," said Trotty, anxious to excuse himself. "We have been tried very hard."

Sir Joseph still repeating "Take the letter, take the letter!" and Mr. Fish not only saying the same thing, but giving additional force to the request by motioning the bearer to the door, he had nothing for it but to make his bow and leave the house. And in the street, poor Trotty pulled his worn old hat down on his head, to hide the grief he felt at getting no hold on the New Year, anywhere.

He didn't even lift his hat to look up at the Bell tower when he came to the old church on his return. He halted there a moment, from habit: and knew that it was growing dark, and that the steeple rose above him, indistinct and faint, in the murky air. He knew, too, that the Chimes would ring immediately; and that they sounded to his fancy, at such a time, like voices in the clouds. But he only made the more haste to deliver the Alderman's letter, and get out of the way before they began; for he dreaded to hear them tagging "Friends and Fathers, Friends and Fathers," to the burden they had rung out last.

Toby discharged himself of his commission, therefore, with all possible speed, and set off trotting

homeward. But what with his pace, which wa at best an awkward one in the street; and wha with his hat, which didn't improve it; he trotte against somebody in less than no time, and was ser staggering out into the road.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure!" said Trotty pulling up his hat in great confusion, and betwee the hat and the torn lining, fixing his head into kind of bee-hive. "I hope I haven't hurt you."

As to hurting anybody, Toby was not such a absolute Samson, but that he was much more likely t be hurt himself: and indeed, he had flown out int the road, like a shuttlecock. He had such a opinion of his own strength, however, that he wa in real concern for the other party: and said again

"I hope I haven't hurt you?"

The man against whom he had run; a sun-browned, sinewy, country-looking man, with grizzlec hair, and a rough chin; stared at him for a moment, as if he suspected him to be in jest. But satisfiec of his good faith, he answered:

"No, friend. You have not hurt me."

"Nor the child, I hope?" said Trotty.

"Nor the child," returned the man. "I thank you kindly."

As he said so, he glanced at a little girl he carried in his arms, asleep; and shading her face with the long end of the poor handkerchief he wore about his throat, went slowly on.

The tone in which he said "I thank you kindly," penetrated Trotty's heart. He was so jaded and foot-sore, and so soiled with travel, and looked about him so forlorn and strange, that it was a comfort to him to be able to thank any one: no matter for how little. Toby stood gazing after him as he

lodded wearily away; with the child's arm clinging round his neck.

At the figure in the worn shoes—now the very ıade and ghost of shoes—rough leather leggings, ɔmmon frock, and broad slouched hat, Trotty stood azing: blind to the whole street. And at the hild's arm, clinging round its neck.

Before he merged into the darkness, the traveller :opped; and looking round, and seeing Trotty :anding there yet, seemed undecided whether to eturn or go on. After doing first the one and then ıe other, he came back; and Trotty went half way ɔ meet him.

"You can tell me, perhaps," said the man with a aint smile, "and if you can I am sure you will, nd I'd rather ask you than another—where Aldernan Cute lives."

"Close at hand," replied Toby. "I'll show ou his house with pleasure."

"I was to have gone to him elsewhere to-morrow," aid the man, accompanying Toby, "but I'm uneasy ınder suspicion, and want to clear myself, and to ɔe free to go and seek my bread—I don't know where. So, maybe he'll forgive my going to his ıouse to-night."

"It's impossible," cried Toby with a start, "that your name's Fern!"

"Eh!" cried the other, turning on him in stonishment.

"Fern! Will Fern!" said Trotty.

"That's my name," replied the other.

"Why then," cried Trotty, seizing him by the arm, and looking cautiously round, "for Heaven's sake don't go to him! Don't go to him! He'll put you down as sure as ever you were born.

Here! come up this alley, and I'll tell you wha I mean. Don't go to *him.*"

His new acquaintance looked as if he though him mad; but he bore him company nevertheless When they were shrouded from observation, Trotty told him what he knew, and what character he had received, and all about it.

The subject of his history listened to it with a calmness that surprised him. He did not contradict or interrupt it, once. He nodded his head now and then—more in corroboration of an old and worn-out story, it appeared, than in refutation of it; and once or twice threw back his hat, and passed his freckled hand over a brow, where every furrow he had ploughed seemed to have set its image in little. But he did no more.

"It's true enough in the main," he said, "master. I could sift grain from husk here and there, but let it be as 'tis. What odds? I have gone against his plans; to my misfortun'. I can't help it; I should do the like to-morrow. As to character, them gentlefolks will search and search, and pry and pry, and have it as free from spot or speck in us, afore they'll help us to a dry good word! Well! I hope they don't lose good opinion as easy as we do, or their lives is strict indeed, and hardly worth the keeping. For myself, master, I never took with that hand"—holding it before him—"what wasn't my own; and never held it back from work, however hard, or poorly paid. Whoever can deny it, let him chop it off! But when work won't maintain me like a human creetur; when my living is so bad, that I am Hungry, out of doors and in; when I see a whole working life begin that way, go on

at way, and end that way, without a chance or hange; then I say to the gentlefolks 'Keep away om me! Let my cottage be. My doors is ark enough without your darkening of 'em more. Don't look for me to come up into the Park to elp the show when there's a Birthday, or a fine peechmaking, or what not. Act your Plays and ames without me, and be welcome to 'em and njoy 'em. We've nowt to do with one another. 'm best let alone!'"

Seeing that the child in his arms had opened her yes, and was looking about her in wonder, he hecked himself to say a word or two of foolish rattle in her ear, and stand her on the ground eside him. Then slowly winding one of her long resses round and round his rough forefinger like a ing, while she hung about his dusty leg, he said to Trotty,

"I'm not a cross-grained man by natur', I elieve; and easy satisfied, I'm sure. I bear no ll will against none of 'em: I only want to live ike one of the Almighty's creeturs. I can't, I lon't; and so there's a pit dug between me and hem that can and do. There's others like me. You might tell 'em off by hundreds and by housands, sooner than by ones."

Trotty knew he spoke the Truth in this, and hook his head to signify as much.

"I've got a bad name this way," said Fern; "and I'm not likely, I'm afeared, to get a better. 'Tan't lawful to be out of sorts, and I AM out of sorts, though God knows I'd sooner bear a cheerful spirit if I could. Well! I don't know as this Alderman could hurt *me* much by sending me to jail; but without a friend to speak a word for me,

he might do it; and you see—!" pointing downward with his finger, at the child.

"She has a beautiful face," said Trotty.

"Why yes!" replied the other in a low voice as he gently turned it up with both his hands towards his own, and looked upon it steadfastly "I've thought so, many times. I've thought so when my hearth was very cold, and cupboard very bare. I thought so t'other night, when we were taken like two thieves. But they—they shouldn't try the little face too often, should they, Lilian? That's hardly fair upon a man!"

He sank his voice so low, and gazed upon her with an air so stern and strange, that Toby, to divert the current of his thoughts, inquired if his wife were living.

"I never had one," he returned, shaking his head. "She's my brother's child: an orphan. Nine year old, though you'd hardly think it; but she's tired and worn out now. They'd have taken care on her, the Union; eight-and-twenty mile away from where we live; between four walls (as they took care of my old father when he couldn't work no more, though he didn't trouble 'em long); but I took her instead, and she's lived with me ever since. Her mother had a friend once, in London here. We are trying to find her, and to find work too; but it's a large place. Never mind. More room for us to walk about in, Lilly!"

Meeting the child's eyes with a smile which melted Toby more than tears, he shook him by the hand.

"I don't so much as know your name," he said, "but I've opened my heart free to you, for I'm

ankful to you; with good reason. I'll take your dvice, and keep clear of this——"

"Justice," suggested Toby.

"Ah!" he said. "If that's the name they give im. This Justice. And to-morrow will try hether there's better fortun' to be met with, omewheres near London. Good night. A Iappy New Year!"

"Stay!" cried Trotty, catching at his hand, as e relaxed his grip. "Stay! The New Year ever can be happy to me, if we part like this. The New Year never can be happy to me, if I see e child and you, go wandering away, you don't now where, without a shelter for your heads. Come home with me! I'm a poor man, living in poor place; but I can give you lodging for one ight and never miss it. Come home with me! Here! I'll take her!" cried Trotty, lifting up he child. "A pretty one! I'd carry twenty times er weight, and never know I'd got it. Tell me f I go too quick for you. I'm very fast. I always vas!" Trotty said this, taking about six of his rotting paces to one stride of his fatigued companion; and with his thin legs quivering again, eneath the load he bore.

"Why, she's as light," said Trotty, trotting in is speech as well as in his gait; for he couldn't ear to be thanked, and dreaded a moment's pause; as light as a feather. Lighter than a Peacock's eather—a great deal lighter. Here we are, and ere we go! Round this first turning to the right, Uncle Will, and past the pump, and sharp off up the passage to the left, right opposite the public-house. Here we are and here we go! Cross over, Uncle Will, and mind the kidney pieman at the

corner! Here we are and here we go! Down the Mews here, Uncle Will, and stop at the black door, with 'T. Veck, Ticket Porter' wrote upon a board; and here we are and here we go, and here we are indeed, my precious Meg, surprising you!'

With which words Trotty, in a breathless state, set the child down before his daughter in the middle of the floor. The little visitor looked once at Meg; and doubting nothing in that face, but trusting everything she saw there; ran into her arms.

"Here we are and here we go!" cried Trotty, running round the room, and choking audibly. "Here, Uncle Will! Here's a fire you know! Why don't you come to the fire? Oh here we are and here we go! Meg, my precious darling, where's the kettle? Here it is and here it goes, and it'll bile in no time!"

Trotty really had picked up the kettle somewhere or other in the course of his wild career, and now put it on the fire: while Meg, seating the child in a warm corner, knelt down on the ground before her, and pulled off her shoes, and dried her wet feet on a cloth. Ay, and she laughed at Trotty too — so pleasantly, so cheerfully, that Trotty could have blessed her where she kneeled: for he had seen that, when they entered, she was sitting by the fire in tears.

"Why, father!" said Meg. "You're crazy to-night, I think. I don't know what the Bells would say to that. Poor little feet. How cold they are!"

"Oh, they're warmer now!" exclaimed the child. "They're quite warm now!"

"No, no, no," said Meg. "We haven't rubbed

:m half enough. We're so busy. So busy! And when they're done, we'll brush out the damp air; and when that's done, we'll bring some colour to the poor pale face with fresh water; and when that's done, we'll be so gay, and brisk, and happy—!"

The child, in a burst of sobbing, clasped her round the neck; caressed her fair cheek with its hand; and said, "Oh Meg! oh dear Meg!"

Toby's blessing could have done no more. Who could do more!

"Why, father!" cried Meg, after a pause.

"Here I am and here I go, my dear," said Trotty.

"Good Gracious me!" cried Meg. "He's crazy! He's put the dear child's bonnet on the kettle, and hung the lid behind the door!"

"I didn't go to do it, my love," said Trotty, hastily repairing this mistake. "Meg, my dear?"

Meg looked towards him and saw that he had elaborately stationed himself behind the chair of their male visitor, where with many mysterious gestures he was holding up the sixpence he had earned.

"I see, my dear," said Trotty, "as I was coming in, half an ounce of tea lying somewhere on the stairs; and I'm pretty sure there was a bit of bacon too. As I don't remember where it was, exactly; I'll go myself and try to find 'em."

With this inscrutable artifice, Toby withdrew to purchase the viands he had spoken of, for ready money, at Mrs. Chickenstalker's; and presently came back, pretending he had not been able to find them, at first, in the dark.

"But here they are at last," said Trotty, setting

out the tea-things, "all correct! I was prett sure it was tea, and a rasher. So it is. Meg, m pet, if you'll just make the tea, while your unworth father toasts the bacon, we shall be ready, im mediate. It's a curious circumstance," said Trotty proceeding in his cookery, with the assistance c the toasting-fork, "curious, but well known to m friends, that I never care, myself, for rashers, no for tea. I like to see other people enjoy 'em," said Trotty, speaking very loud, to impress the fac upon his guest, "but to me, as food, they're dis agreeable."

Yet Trotty sniffed the savour of the hissing baco —ah!—as if he liked it; and when he poured th boiling water in the tea-pot, looked lovingly dow into the depths of that snug cauldron, and suffere the fragrant steam to curl about his nose, and wreath his head and face in a thick cloud. However, fo all this, he neither ate nor drank, except at the ver beginning, a mere morsel for form's sake, which h appeared to eat with infinite relish, but declared wa perfectly uninteresting to him.

No. Trotty's occupation was, to see Will Fer and Lilian eat and drink; and so was Meg's. An never did spectators at a city dinner or court ban quet find such high delight in seeing others feast although it were a monarch or a pope: as thos two did, in looking on that night. Meg smile at Trotty, Trotty laughed at Meg. Meg shoo her head, and made belief to clap her hands applauding Trotty; Trotty conveyed, in dumb show, unintelligible narratives of how and whe and where he had found their visitors, to Meg and they were happy. Very happy.

"Although," thought Trotty, sorrowfully, a

e watched Meg's face; "that match is broken ff, I see!"

"Now, I'll tell you what," said Trotty after ea. "The little one, she sleeps with Meg, I now."

"With good Meg!" cried the child, caressing er. "With Meg."

"That's right," said Trotty. "And I shouldn't vonder if she kiss Meg's father, won't she? *I*'m Meg's father."

Mightily delighted Trotty was, when the child vent timidly towards him, and having kissed him, ell back upon Meg again.

"She's as sensible as Solomon," said Trotty. 'Here we come and here we—no, we don't—I lon't mean that—I—what was I saying, Meg, ny precious?"

Meg looked towards their guest, who leaned upon her chair, and with his face turned from her, ondled the child's head, half hidden in her lap.

"To be sure," said Toby. "To be sure! I don't know what I'm rambling on about, to-night. My wits are wool-gathering, I think. Will Fern, you come along with me. You're tired o death, and broken down for want of rest. You come along with me."

The man still played with the child's curls, still leaned upon Meg's chair, still turned away his face. He didn't speak, but in his rough coarse fingers, clenching and expanding in the fair hair of the child, there was an eloquence that said enough.

"Yes, yes," said Trotty, answering unconsciously what he saw expressed in his daughter's face. "Take her with you, Meg. Get her to bed. There! Now Will, I'll show you where you

lie. It's not much of a place: only a loft: but having a loft, I always say, is one of the great conveniences of living in a mews; and till this coach-house and stable gets a better let, we live here cheap. There's plenty of sweet hay up there, belonging to a neighbour; and it's as clean as hands and Meg can make it. Cheer up! Don't give way. A new heart for a New Year, always!"

The hand released from the child's hair, had fallen, trembling, into Trotty's hand. So Trotty, talking without intermission, led him out as tenderly and easily as if he had been a child himself.

Returning before Meg, he listened for an instant at the door of her little chamber; an adjoining room. The child was murmuring a simple Prayer before lying down to sleep; and when she had remembered Meg's name, "Dearly, Dearly"—so her words ran—Trotty heard her stop and ask for his.

It was some short time before the foolish little old fellow could compose himself to mend the fire, and draw his chair to the warm hearth. But, when he had done so, and had trimmed the light, he took his newspaper from his pocket, and began to read. Carelessly at first, and skimming up and down the columns; but with an earnest and a sad attention, very soon.

For this same dreaded paper re-directed Trotty's thoughts into the channel they had taken all that day, and which the day's events had so marked out and shaped. His interest in the two wanderers had set him on another course of thinking, and a happier one, for the time; but being alone again, and reading of the crimes and violences of the people, he relapsed into his former train.

In this mood, he came to an account (and it was ot the first he had ever read) of a woman who ad laid her desperate hands not only on her own fe but on that of her young child. A crime so rrible, and so revolting to his soul, dilated with e love of Meg, that he let the journal drop, and ll back in his chair, appalled.

"Unnatural and cruel!" Toby cried. "Unatural and cruel! None but people who were ad at heart, born bad: who had no business on e earth: could do such deeds. It's too true, ll I've heard to-day; too just, too full of proof. Ve're Bad!"

The Chimes took up the words so suddenly—urst out so loud, and clear, and sonorous—that the Bells seemed to strike him in his chair.

And what was that they said?

"Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Come and see us, come and see us, Drag im to us, drag him to us, Haunt and hunt him, aunt and hunt him, Break his slumbers, break his lumbers! Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open vide Toby, Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open vide Toby—" then fiercely back to their impetuus strain again, and ringing in the very bricks and laster on the walls.

Toby listened. Fancy, fancy! His remorse or having run away from them that afternoon! No, o. Nothing of the kind. Again, again, and yet dozen times again. "Haunt and hunt him, aunt and hunt him, Drag him to us, drag him to us!" Deafening the whole town!

"Meg," said Trotty, softly: tapping at her door. "Do you hear anything?"

"I hear the Bells, father. Surely they're very loud to-night."

"Is she asleep?" said Toby, making an excuse for peeping in.

"So peacefully and happily! I can't leave her yet though, father. Look how she holds my hand!"

"Meg," whispered Trotty. "Listen to the Bells!"

She listened, with her face towards him all the time. But it underwent no change. She didn't understand them.

Trotty withdrew, resumed his seat by the fire and once more listened by himself. He remained here a little time.

It was impossible to bear it; their energy was dreadful.

"If the tower-door is really open," said Toby hastily laying aside his apron, but never thinking of his hat, "what's to hinder me from going up into the steeple and satisfying myself? If it's shut I don't want any other satisfaction. That's enough."

He was pretty certain as he slipped out quietly into the street that he should find it shut and locked for he knew the door well, and had so rarely seen it open, that he couldn't reckon above three times in all. It was a low arched portal, outside the church, in a dark nook behind a column; and had such great iron hinges, and such a monstrous lock, that there was more hinge and lock than door.

But what was his astonishment when, coming bare-headed to the church; and putting his hand into this dark nook, with a certain misgiving that it might be unexpectedly seized, and a shivering

ropensity to draw it back again; he found that ıe door, which opened outwards, actually stood jar!

He thought, on the first surprise, of going back; r of getting a light, or a companion; but his courge aided him immediately, and he determined to scend alone.

"What have I to fear?" said Trotty. "It's church! Besides, the ringers may be there, and ıave forgotten to shut the door."

So he went in; feeling his way as he went, like blind man; for it was very dark. And very uiet, for the Chimes were silent.

The dust from the street had blown into the ecess; and lying there, heaped up, made it so soft ınd velvet-like to the foot, that there was something tartling even in that. The narrow stair was so lose to the door, too, that he stumbled at the very irst; and shutting the door upon himself, by striking t with his foot, and causing it to rebound back ıeavily, he couldn't open it again.

This was another reason, however, for going on. Trotty groped his way, and went on. Up, up, ıp, and round and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

It was a disagreeable staircase for that groping vork; so low and narrow, that his groping hand was always touching something; and it often felt so like a man or ghostly figure standing up erect and naking room for him to pass without discovery, that he would rub the smooth wall upward searching for its face, and downward searching for its feet, while a chill tingling crept all over him. Twice or thrice, a door or niche broke the monotonous surface; and then it seemed a gap as wide as the

whole church; and he felt on the brink of an abyss, and going to tumble headlong down; until he found the wall again.

Still up, up, up; and round and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

At length, the dull and stifling atmosphere began to freshen: presently to feel quite windy: presently it blew so strong, that he could hardly keep his legs. But he got to an arched window in the tower, breast high, and holding tight, looked down upon the house-tops, on the smoking chimneys, on the blurr and blotch of lights (towards the place where Meg was wondering where he was and calling to him perhaps), all kneaded up together in a leaven of mist and darkness.

This was the belfry, where the ringers came. He had caught hold of one of the frayed ropes which hung down through apertures in the oaken roof. At first he started, thinking it was hair; then trembled at the very thought of waking the deep Bell. The Bells themselves were higher. Higher, Trotty, in his fascination, or in working out the spell upon him, groped his way. By ladders now, and toilsomely, for it was steep, and not too certain holding for the feet.

Up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

Until, ascending through the floor, and pausing with his head just raised above its beams, he came among the Bells. It was barely possible to make out their great shapes in the gloom; but there they were. Shadowy, and dark, and dumb.

A heavy sense of dread and loneliness fell instantly upon him, as he climbed into this airy nest of stone and metal. His head went round

nd round. He listened, and then raised a wild
Holloa!"

Holloa! was mournfully protracted by the
choes.

Giddy, confused, and out of breath, and
ightened, Toby looked about him vacantly, and
ank down in a swoon.

THIRD QUARTER

BLACK are the brooding clouds and troubled the deep waters, when the Sea of Thought, first heaving from a calm, gives up its Dead. Monsters uncouth and wild, arise in premature, imperfect resurrection; the several parts and shapes of different things are joined and mixed by chance; and when, and how, and by what wonderful degrees, each separates from each, and every sense and object of the mind resumes its usual form and lives again, no man—though every man is every day the casket of this type of the Great Mystery—can tell.

So, when and how the darkness of the night-black steeple changed to shining light; when and how the solitary tower was peopled with a myriad figures; when and how the whispered "Haunt and hunt him," breathing monotonously through his sleep or swoon, became a voice exclaiming in the waking ears of Trotty, "Break his slumbers"; when and how he ceased to have a sluggish and confused idea that such things were, companioning a host of others that were not; there are no dates or means to tell. But: awake and standing on his feet upon the boards where he had lately lain: he saw this Goblin Sight.

He saw the tower, whither his charmed footsteps had brought him, swarming with dwarf phantoms,

pirits, elfin creatures of the Bells. He saw them capping, flying, dropping, pouring from the Bells without a pause. He saw them, round him on the round; above him, in the air; clambering from him, by the ropes below; looking down upon him, from the massive iron-girded beams; peeping in upon him, through the chinks and loopholes in the walls; spreading away and away from him in enlarging circles, as the water-ripples give place to a huge stone that suddenly comes plashing in among them. He saw them, of all aspects and all shapes. He saw them ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed. He saw them young, he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw them cruel, he saw them merry, he saw them grim; he saw them dance, and heard them sing; he saw them tear their hair, and heard them howl. He saw the air thick with them. He saw them come and go, incessantly. He saw them riding downward, soaring upward, sailing off afar, perching near at hand, all restless and all violently active. Stone, and brick, and slate, and tile, became transparent to him as to them. He saw them *in* the houses, busy at the sleepers' beds. He saw them soothing people in their dreams; he saw them beating them with knotted whips; he saw them yelling in their ears; he saw them playing softest music on their pillows; he saw them cheering some with the songs of birds and the perfume of flowers; he saw them flashing awful faces on the troubled rest of others, from enchanted mirrors which they carried in their hands.

He saw these creatures, not only among sleeping men but waking also, active in pursuits irreconcilable with one another, and possessing or assuming natures the most opposite. He saw one buckling

on innumerable wings to increase his speed; another loading himself with chains and weights to retard his. He saw some putting the hands of clocks forward, some putting the hands of clocks backward, some endeavouring to stop the clock entirely. He saw them representing, here a marriage ceremony, there a funeral; in this chamber an election, in that a ball; everywhere, restless and untiring motion.

Bewildered by the host of shifting and extraordinary figures, as well as by the uproar of the Bells, which all this while were ringing, Trotty clung to a wooden pillar for support, and turned his white face here and there, in mute and stunned astonishment.

As he gazed, the Chimes stopped. Instantaneous change! The whole swarm fainted! their forms collapsed, their speed deserted them; they sought to fly, but in the act of falling died and melted into air. No fresh supply succeeded them. One straggler leaped down pretty briskly from the surface of the Great Bell, and alighted on his feet, but he was dead and gone before he could turn round. Some few of the late company who had gambolled in the tower, remained there, spinning over and over a little longer; but these became at every turn more faint, and few, and feeble, and soon went the way of the rest. The last of all was one small hunchback, who had got into an echoing corner, where he twirled and twirled, and floated by himself a long time; showing such perseverance, that at last he dwindled to a leg and even to a foot, before he finally retired; but he vanished in the end, and then the tower was silent.

Then and not before, did Trotty see in every Bell a bearded figure of the bulk and stature of the

ell—incomprehensibly, a figure and the Bell itself. igantic, grave, and darkly watchful of him, as he ood rooted to the ground.

Mysterious and awful figures! Resting on othing; poised in the night air of the tower, with eir draped and hooded heads merged in the dim oof; motionless and shadowy. Shadowy and ark, although he saw them by some light belonging o themselves—none else was there—each with its uffled hand upon its goblin mouth.

He could not plunge down wildly through the pening in the floor, for all power of motion had eserted him. Otherwise he would have done so —ay, would have thrown himself, headforemost, rom the steeple-top, rather than have seen them vatching him with eyes that would have waked and vatched although the pupils had been taken out.

Again, again, the dread and terror of the lonely lace, and of the wild and fearful night that reigned here, touched him like a spectral hand. His listance from all help; the long, dark, winding, ghost-beleaguered way that lay between him and he earth on which men lived; his being high, high igh, up there, where it had made him dizzy to see he birds fly in the day; cut off from all good vho at such an hour were safe at home an n their beds; all this struck coldly th ot as a reflection but a bodily sensa ime his eyes and thoughts and fe pon the watchful figures; which, n any figures of this world by the d shade enwrapping and enfolding th their looks and forms above the floor, were n seen as were the stalwart

bars and beams, set up there to support the Bells. These hemmed them, in a very forest of hewn timber; from the entanglements, intricacies, and depths of which, as from among the boughs of dead wood blighted for their phantom use, they kept their darksome and unwinking watch.

A blast of air — how cold and shrill! — came moaning through the tower. As it died away the Great Bell, or the Goblin of the Great Bell spoke.

"What visitor is this!" it said. The voice was low and deep, and Trotty fancied that it sounded in the other figures as well.

"I thought my name was called by the Chimes!" said Trotty, raising his hands in an attitude of supplication. "I hardly know why I am here, or how I came. I have listened to the Chimes these many years. They have cheered me often."

"And you have thanked them?" said the Bell.

"A thousand times!" cried Trotty.

"How?"

"I am a poor man," faltered Trotty, "and could only thank them in words."

"And always so?" inquired the Goblin of the [illegible] "Have you never done us wrong in words?" [illegible] " cried Trotty, eagerly.

[illegible] done us foul, and false, and wicked [illegible] ords?" pursued the Goblin of the [illegible]

[illegible] about to answer, "Never!" But [illegible] was confused.

[illegible] of Time," said the Phantom, [illegible] ce! Time is for his [illegible] ement; for his greater [illegible] ness, his better life; his

progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view, and set there, in the period when Time and He began. Ages of darkness, wickedness, and violence, have come and gone: millions uncountable, have suffered, lived, and died: to point the way before him. Who seeks to turn him back, or stay him on his course, arrests a mighty engine which will strike the meddler dead; and be the fiercer and the wilder, ever, for its momentary check!"

"I never did so, to my knowledge, Sir," said Trotty. "It was quite by accident if I did. I wouldn't go to do it, I'm sure."

"Who puts into the mouth of Time, or of its servants," said the Goblin of the Bell, "a cry of lamentation for days which have had their trial and their failure, and have left deep traces of it which the blind may see—a cry that only serves the Present Time, by showing men how much it needs their help when any ears can listen to regrets for such a Past—who does this, does a wrong. And you have done that wrong to us, the Chimes."

Trotty's first excess of fear was gone. But he had felt tenderly and gratefully towards the Bells, as you have seen; and when he heard himself arraigned as one who had offended them so weightily, his heart was touched with penitence and grief.

"If you knew," said Trotty, clasping his hands earnestly—"or perhaps you do know—if you know how often you have kept me company; how often you have cheered me up when I've been low; how you were quite the plaything of my little daughter Meg (almost the only one she ever had) when first her mother died, and she and me were

left alone — you won't bear malice for a hasty word!"

"Who hears in us, the Chimes, one note bespeaking disregard, or stern regard, of any hope or joy, or pain, or sorrow, of the many-sorrowed throng; who hears us make response to any creed that gauges human passions and affections, as it gauges the amount of miserable food on which humanity may pine and wither; does us wrong. That wrong you have done us!" said the Bell.

"I have!" said Trotty. "O forgive me!"

"Who hears us echo the dull vermin of the earth: the Putters Down of crushed and broken natures, formed to be raised up higher than such maggots of the time can crawl or can conceive," pursued the Goblin of the Bell: "who does so, does us wrong. And you have done us wrong!"

"Not meaning it," said Trotty. "In my ignorance. Not meaning it!"

"Lastly and most of all," pursued the Bell. "Who turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind; abandons them as Vile; and does not trace and track with pitying eyes the unfenced precipice by which they fell from Good—grasping in their fall some tufts and shreds of that lost soil, and clinging to them still when bruised and dying in the gulf below; does wrong to Heaven and Man, to Time and to Eternity. And you have done that wrong!"

"Spare me," cried Trotty, falling on his knees; "for Mercy's sake!"

"Listen!" said the Shadow.

"Listen!" cried the other Shadows.

"Listen!" said a clear and childlike voice,

which Trotty thought he recognised as having heard before.

The organ sounded faintly in the church below. Swelling by degrees, the melody ascended to the roof, and filled the choir and nave. Expanding more and more, it rose up, up; up, up; higher, higher, higher up; awakening agitated hearts within the burly piles of oak, the hollow bells, the iron-bound doors, the stairs of solid stone; until the tower walls were insufficient to contain it, and it soared into the sky.

No wonder that an old man's breast could not contain a sound so vast and mighty. It broke from that weak prison in a rush of tears; and Trotty put his hands before his face.

"Listen!" said the Shadow.

"Listen!" said the other Shadows.

"Listen!" said the child's voice.

A solemn strain of blended voices, rose into the tower.

It was a very low and mournful strain: a Dirge: and as he listened, Trotty heard his child among the singers.

"She is dead!" exclaimed the old man. "Meg is dead! Her Spirit calls to me. I hear it!"

"The Spirit of your child bewails the dead, and mingles with the dead—dead hopes, dead fancies, dead imaginings of youth," returned the Bell, "but she is living. Learn from her life, a living truth. Learn from the creature dearest to your heart, how bad the Bad are born. See every bud and leaf plucked one by one from off the fairest stem, and know how bare and wretched it may be. Follow her! To desperation!"

Each of the shadowy figures stretched its righ arm forth, and pointed downward.

"The Spirit of the Chimes is your companion," said the figure. "Go! It stands behind you!"

Trotty turned, and saw—the child! The chilc Will Fern had carried in the street; the chilc whom Meg had watched, but now, asleep!

"I carried her myself, to-night," said Trotty "In these arms!"

"Show him what he calls himself," said the dark figures, one and all.

The tower opened at his feet. He looked down, and beheld his own form, lying at the bottom, on the outside: crushed and motionless.

"No more a living man!" cried Trotty. "Dead!"

"Dead!" said the figures all together.

"Gracious Heaven! And the New Year——"

"Past," said the figures.

"What!" he cried, shuddering. "I missed my way, and coming on the outside of this tower in the dark, fell down—a year ago?"

"Nine years ago!" replied the figures.

As they gave the answer, they recalled their outstretched hands; and where their figures had been, there the Bells were.

And they rang; their time being come again. And once again, vast multitudes of phantoms sprang into existence; once again, were incoherently engaged, as they had been before; once again, faded on the stopping of the Chimes; and dwindled into nothing.

"What are these?" he asked his guide. "If I am not mad, what are these?"

"Spirits of the Bells. Their sound upon the

air," returned the child. "They take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals, and the recollections they have stored up, give them."

"And you," said Trotty, wildly. "What are you?"

"Hush, hush!" returned the child. "Look here!"

In a poor, mean room: working at the same kind of embroidery which he had often, often seen before her; Meg, his own dear daughter, was presented to his view. He made no effort to imprint his kisses on her face; he did not strive to clasp her to his loving heart; he knew that such endearments were for him no more. But he held his trembling breath; and brushed away the blinding tears, that he might look upon her; that he might only see her.

Ah! Changed. Changed. The light of the clear eye, how dimmed. The bloom, how faded from the cheek. Beautiful she was, as she had ever been, but Hope, Hope, Hope, oh where was the fresh Hope that had spoken to him like a voice!

She looked up from her work, at a companion. Following her eyes, the old man started back.

In the woman grown, he recognised her at a glance. In the long silken hair, he saw the selfsame curls; around the lips, the child's expression lingering still. See! In the eyes, now turned inquiringly on Meg, there shone the very look that scanned those features when he brought her home!

Then what was this, beside him!

Looking with awe into its face, he saw a something reigning there: a lofty something, undefined

and indistinct, which made it hardly more than remembrance of that child—as yonder figure migh be—yet it was the same: the same: and wore th dress.

Hark. They were speaking!

"Meg," said Lilian, hesitating. "How often yo raise your head from your work to look at me!"

"Are my looks so altered, that they frighte you?" asked Meg.

"Nay, dear! But you smile at that, yourself Why not smile, when you look at me, Meg?"

"I do so. Do I not?" she answered: smilin on her.

"Now you do," said Lilian, "but not usually When you think I'm busy, and don't see you, yo look so anxious and so doubtful, that I hardly lik to raise my eyes. There is little cause for smilin in this hard and toilsome life, but you were once s cheerful."

"Am I not now!" cried Meg, speaking in tone of strange alarm, and rising to embrace her "Do *I* make our weary life more weary to you Lilian!"

"You have been the only thing that made i life," said Lilian, fervently kissing her; "sometimes the only thing that made me care to live so Meg. Such work, such work! So many hours, so many days, so many long, long nights of hopeless, cheerless, never-ending work—not to heap u riches, not to live grandly or gaily, not to live upo enough, however coarse; but to earn bare bread to scrape together just enough to toil upon, an want upon, and keep alive in us the consciousnes of our hard fate! Oh Meg, Meg!" she raise her voice, and twined her arms about her as sh

spoke, like one in pain. "How can the cruel world go round, and bear to look upon such lives!"

"Lilly!" said Meg, soothing her, and putting back her hair from her wet face. "Why Lilly! You! So pretty and so young!"

"Oh Meg!" she interrupted, holding her at arm's-length, and looking in her face imploringly. "The worst of all, the worst of all! Strike me old, Meg! Wither me and shrivel me, and free me from the dreadful thoughts that tempt me in my youth!"

Trotty turned to look upon his guide. But the Spirit of the child had taken flight. Was gone.

Neither did he himself remain in the same place; for Sir Joseph Bowley, Friend and Father of the Poor, held a great festivity at Bowley Hall, in honour of the natal day of Lady Bowley; and as Lady Bowley had been born on New Year's Day (which the local newspapers considered an especial pointing of the finger of Providence to number One, as Lady Bowley's destined figure in Creation), it was on a New Year's Day that this festivity took place.

Bowley Hall was full of visitors. The red-faced gentleman was there, Mr. Filer was there, the great Alderman Cute was there—Alderman Cute had a sympathetic feeling with great people, and had considerably improved his acquaintance with Sir Joseph Bowley on the strength of his attentive letter: indeed had become quite a friend of the family since then—and many guests were there. Trotty's ghost was there, wandering about, poor phantom, drearily; and looking for its guide.

There was to be a great dinner in the Great Hall. At which Sir Joseph Bowley, in his cele-

brated character of Friend and Father of the Poor, was to make his great speech. Certain plum-puddings were to be eaten by his Friends and Children in another Hall first; and, at a given signal, Friends and Children flocking in among their Friends and Fathers, were to form a family assemblage, with not one manly eye therein unmoistened by emotion.

But there was more than this to happen. Even more than this. Sir Joseph Bowley, Baronet and Member of Parliament, was to play a match at skittles—real skittles—with his tenants.

"Which quite reminds one," said Alderman Cute, "of the days of old King Hal, stout King Hal, bluff King Hal. Ah. Fine character!"

"Very," said Mr. Filer, dryly. "For marrying women and murdering 'em. Considerably more than the average number of wives by the bye."

"You'll marry the beautiful ladies, and not murder 'em, eh?" said Alderman Cute to the heir of Bowley, aged twelve. "Sweet boy! We shall have this little gentleman in Parliament now," said the Alderman, holding him by the shoulders, and looking as reflective as he could, "before we know where we are. We shall hear of his successes at the poll; his speeches in the House; his overtures from Governments; his brilliant achievements of all kinds; ah! we shall make our little orations about him in the Common Council, I'll be bound; before we have time to look about us!"

"Oh, the difference of shoes and stockings!" Trotty thought. But his heart yearned towards the child, for the love of those same shoeless and stockingless boys, predestined (by the Alderman)

o turn out bad, who might have been the children of poor Meg.

"Richard," moaned Trotty, roaming among the company, to and fro; "where is he? I can't find Richard! Where is Richard?"

Not likely to be there, if still alive! But Trotty's grief and solitude confused him; and he still went wandering among the gallant company, looking for his guide, and saying, "Where is Richard? Show me Richard!"

He was wandering thus, when he encountered Mr. Fish, the confidential Secretary: in great agitation.

"Bless my heart and soul!" cried Mr. Fish. "Where's Alderman Cute? Has anybody seen the Alderman?"

Seen the Alderman? Oh dear! Who could ever help seeing the Alderman? He was so considerate, so affable; he bore so much in mind the natural desire of folks to see him; that if he had a fault, it was the being constantly On View. And wherever the great people were, there, to be sure, attracted by the kindred sympathy between great souls, was Cute.

Several voices cried that he was in the circle round Sir Joseph. Mr. Fish made way there; found him; and took him secretly into a window near at hand. Trotty joined them. Not of his own accord. He felt that his steps were led in that direction.

"My dear Alderman Cute," said Mr. Fish. "A little more this way. The most dreadful circumstance has occurred. I have this moment received the intelligence. I think it will be best not to acquaint Sir Joseph with it till the day is over. You understand Sir Joseph, and will give me your opinion. The most frightful and deplorable event!"

"Fish!" returned the Alderman. "Fish! My good fellow, what is the matter? Nothing revolutionary, I hope! No—no attempted interference with the magistrates?"

"Deedles, the banker," gasped the Secretary. "Deedles Brothers—who was to have been here to-day—high in office in the Goldsmiths' Company——"

"Not stopped!" exclaimed the Alderman. "It can't be!"

"Shot himself."

"Good God!"

"Put a double-barrelled pistol to his mouth, in his own counting-house," said Mr. Fish, "and blew his brains out. No motive. Princely circumstances!"

"Circumstances!" exclaimed the Alderman. "A man of noble fortune. One of the most respectable of men. Suicide, Mr. Fish! By his own hand!"

"This very morning," returned Mr. Fish.

"Oh the brain, the brain!" exclaimed the pious Alderman, lifting up his hands. "Oh the nerves, the nerves; the mysteries of this machine called Man! Oh the little that unhinges it: poor creatures that we are! Perhaps a dinner, Mr. Fish. Perhaps the conduct of his son, who, I have heard, ran very wild, and was in the habit of drawing bills upon him without the least authority! A most respectable man. One of the most respectable men I ever knew! A lamentable instance, Mr. Fish. A public calamity! I shall make a point of wearing the deepest mourning. A most respectable man! But there is One above. We must submit, Mr. Fish. We must submit!"

What, Alderman! No word of Putting Down?

Remember, Justice, your high moral boast and pride. Come, Alderman! Balance those scales. Throw me into this, the empty one, No Dinner, and Nature's founts in some poor woman, dried by starving misery and rendered obdurate to claims for which her offspring *has* authority in holy mother Eve. Weigh me the two, you Daniel going to judgment, when your day shall come! Weigh them, in the eyes of suffering thousands, audience (not unmindful) of the grim farce you play! Or supposing that you strayed from your five wits—it's not so far to go, but that it might be—and laid hands upon that throat of yours, warning your fellows (if you have a fellow) how they croak their comfortable wickedness to raving heads and stricken hearts. What then?

The words rose up in Trotty's breast, as if they had been spoken by some other voice within him. Alderman Cute pledged himself to Mr. Fish that he would assist him in breaking the melancholy catastrophe to Sir Joseph, when the day was over. Then, before they parted, wringing Mr. Fish's hand in bitterness of soul, he said, "The most respectable of men!" And added that he hardly knew: not even he: why such afflictions were allowed on earth.

"It's almost enough to make one think, if one didn't know better," said Alderman Cute, "that at times some motion of a capsizing nature was going on in things, which affected the general economy of the social fabric. Deedles Brothers!"

The skittle-playing came off with immense success. Sir Joseph knocked the pins about quite skilfully; Master Bowley took an innings at a shorter distance also; and everybody said that now,

when a Baronet and the Son of a Baronet played at skittles, the country was coming round again, as fast as it could come.

At its proper time, the Banquet was served up. Trotty involuntarily repaired to the Hall with the rest, for he felt himself conducted thither by some stronger impulse than his own free will. The sight was gay in the extreme; the ladies were very handsome; the visitors delighted, cheerful, and good-tempered. When the lower doors were opened, and the people flocked in, in their rustic dresses, the beauty of the spectacle was at its height; but Trotty only murmured more and more, "Where is Richard! He should help and comfort her! I can't see Richard!"

There had been some speeches made; and Lady Bowley's health had been proposed; and Sir Joseph Bowley had returned thanks; and had made his great speech, showing by various pieces of evidence that he was the born Friend and Father, and so forth; and had given as a Toast, his Friends and Children, and the Dignity of Labour; when a slight disturbance at the bottom of the Hall attracted Toby's notice. After some confusion, noise, and opposition, one man broke through the rest, and stood forward by himself.

Not Richard. No. But one whom he had thought of, and had looked for, many times. In a scantier supply of light, he might have doubted the identity of that worn man, so old, and grey, and bent; but with a blaze of lamps upon his gnarled and knotted head, he knew Will Fern as soon as he stepped forth.

"What is this!" exclaimed Sir Joseph, rising.

"Who gave this man admittance? This is a criminal from prison! Mr. Fish, Sir, *will* you have the goodness——"

"A minute!" said Will Fern. "A minute! My Lady, you was born on this day along with a New Year. Get me a minute's leave to speak."

She made some intercession for him. Sir Joseph took his seat again, with native dignity.

The ragged visitor—for he was miserably dressed—looked round upon the company, and made his homage to them with a humble bow.

"Gentlefolks!" he said. "You've drunk the Labourer. Look at me!"

"Just come from jail," said Mr. Fish.

"Just come from jail," said Will. "And neither for the first time, nor the second, nor the third, nor yet the fourth."

Mr. Filer was heard to remark testily, that four times was over the average; and he ought to be ashamed of himself.

"Gentlefolks!" repeated Will Fern. "Look at me! You see I'm at the worst. Beyond all hurt or harm; beyond your help; for the time when your kind words or kind actions could have done ME good,"—he struck his hand upon his breast, and shook his head, "is gone, with the scent of last year's beans or clover on the air. Let me say a word for these," pointing to the labouring people in the Hall; "and when you're met together, hear the real Truth spoke out for once."

"There's not a man here," said the host, "who would have him for a spokesman."

"Like enough, Sir Joseph. I believe it. Not the less true, perhaps, is what I say. Perhaps that's a proof on it. Gentlefolks, I've lived many

a year in this place. You may see the cottage from the sunk fence over yonder. I've seen the ladies draw it in their books, a hundred times. It looks well in a picter, I've heerd say; but there an't weather in picters, and maybe 'tis fitter for that than for a place to live in. Well! I lived there. How hard—how bitter hard, I lived there, I won't say. Any day in the year, and every day, you can judge for your own selves."

He spoke as he had spoken on the night when Trotty found him in the street. His voice was deeper and more husky, and had a trembling in it now and then; but he never raised it passionately, and seldom lifted it above the firm stern level of the homely facts he stated.

"'Tis harder than you think for, gentlefolks, to grow up decent: commonly decent: in such a place. That I growed up a man and not a brute, says something for me—as I was then. As I am now, there's nothing can be said for me or done for me. I'm past it."

"I am glad this man has entered," observed Sir Joseph, looking round serenely. "Don't disturb him. It appears to be Ordained. He is an Example: a living example. I hope and trust, and confidently expect, that it will not be lost upon my Friends here."

"I dragged on," said Fern, after a moment's silence. "Somehow. Neither me nor any other man knows how; but so heavy, that I couldn't put a cheerful face upon it, or make believe that I was anything but what I was. Now, gentlemen—you gentlemen that sits at Sessions—when you see a man with discontent writ on his face, you says to one another, 'He's suspicious. I has my doubts,'

says you, 'about Will Fern. Watch that fellow!' I don't say, gentlemen, it an't quite nat'ral, but I say 'tis so; and from that hour, whatever Will Fern does, or lets alone—all one—it goes against him."

Alderman Cute stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets, and leaning back in his chair, and smiling, winked at a neighbouring chandelier. As much as to say, "Of course! I told you so. The common cry! Lord bless you, we are up to all this sort of thing—myself and human nature."

"Now, gentlemen," said Will Fern, holding out his hands, and flushing for an instant in his haggard face, "see how your laws are made to trap and hunt us when we're brought to this. I tries to live elsewhere. And I'm a vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here. I goes a-nutting in your woods, and breaks—who don't?—a limber branch or two. To jail with him! One of your keepers sees me in the broad day, near my own patch of garden, with a gun. To jail with him! I has a nat'ral angry word with that man, when I'm free again. To jail with him! I cuts a stick. To jail with him! I eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! It's twenty mile away; and coming back, I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with him! At last, the constable, the keeper—anybody—finds me anywhere, a-doing anything. To jail with him, for he's a vagrant, and a jail-bird known; and the jail's the only home he's got."

The Alderman nodded sagaciously, as who should say, "A very good home too!"

"Do I say this to serve MY cause!" cried Fern. "Who can give me back my liberty, who can give me back my good name, who can give me back my

innocent niece! Not all the Lords and Ladies in wide England. But gentlemen, gentlemen, dealing with other men like me, begin at the right end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we're a-lying in our cradles; give us better food when we're a-working for our lives; give us kinder laws to bring us back when we're a-going wrong; and don't set Jail, Jail, Jail, afore us, everywhere we turn. There an't a condescension you can show the Labourer then, that he won't take, as ready and as grateful as a man can be; for, he has a patient, peaceful, willing heart. But you must put his rightful spirit in him first; for, whether he's a wreck and ruin such as me, or is like one of them that stand here now, his spirit is divided from you at this time. Bring it back, gentlefolks, bring it back! Bring it back, afore the day comes when even his Bible changes in his altered mind, and the words seem to him to read, as they have sometimes read in my own eyes—in Jail: 'Whither thou goest, I can Not go; where thou lodgest, I do Not lodge; thy people are Not my people; Nor thy God my God!'"

A sudden stir and agitation took place in the Hall. Trotty thought at first, that several had risen to eject the man; and hence this change in its appearance. But another moment showed him that the room and all the company had vanished from his sight, and that his daughter was again before him, seated at her work. But in a poorer, meaner garret than before; and with no Lilian by her side.

The frame at which she had worked, was put away upon a shelf and covered up. The chair in which she had sat, was turned against the wall. A

history was written in these little things, and in Meg's grief-worn face. Oh! who could fail to read it!

Meg strained her eyes upon her work until it was too dark to see the threads; and when the night closed in, she lighted her feeble candle and worked on. Still her old father was invisible about her; looking down upon her; loving her—how dearly loving her!—and talking to her in a tender voice about the old times, and the Bells. Though he knew, poor Trotty, though he knew she could not hear him.

A great part of the evening had worn away, when a knock came at her door. She opened it. A man was on the threshold. A slouching, moody, drunken sloven: wasted by intemperance and vice: and with his matted hair and unshorn beard in wild disorder: but with some traces on him, too, of having been a man of good proportion and good features in his youth.

He stopped until he had her leave to enter; and she, retiring a pace or two from the open door, silently and sorrowfully looked upon him. Trotty had his wish. He saw Richard.

"May I come in, Margaret?"

"Yes! Come in. Come in!"

It was well that Trotty knew him before he spoke; for with any doubt remaining on his mind, the harsh discordant voice would have persuaded him that it was not Richard but some other man.

There were but two chairs in the room. She gave him hers, and stood at some short distance from him, waiting to hear what he had to say.

He sat, however, staring vacantly at the floor; with a lustreless and stupid smile. A spectacle of

such deep degradation, of such abject hopelessness of such a miserable downfall, that she put her hand before her face and turned away, lest he should see how much it moved her.

Roused by the rustling of her dress, or some such trifling sound, he lifted his head, and began to speak as if there had been no pause since he entered.

"Still at work, Margaret? You work late."

"I generally do."

"And early?"

"And early."

"So she said. She said you never tired; or never owned that you tired. Not all the time you lived together. Not even when you fainted, between work and fasting. But I told you that, the last time I came."

"You did," she answered. "And I implored you to tell me nothing more; and you made me a solemn promise, Richard, that you never would."

"A solemn promise," he repeated, with a drivelling laugh and vacant stare. "A solemn promise. To be sure. A solemn promise!" Awakening, as it were, after a time; in the same manner as before; he said with sudden animation,

"How can I help it, Margaret? What am I to do? She has been to me again!"

"Again!" cried Meg, clasping her hands. "O, does she think of me so often! Has she been again!"

"Twenty times again," said Richard. "Margaret, she haunts me. She comes behind me in the street, and thrusts it in my hand. I hear her foot upon the ashes when I'm at my work (ah, ha! that an't often), and before I can turn my head, her

voice is in my ear, saying, 'Richard, don't look ound. For Heaven's love, give her this!' She brings it where I live; she sends it in letters; he taps at the window and lays it on the sill. What *can* I do? Look at it!"

He held out in his hand a little purse, and hinked the money it enclosed.

"Hide it," said Meg. "Hide it! When she omes again, tell her, Richard, that I love her in my oul. That I never lie down to sleep, but I bless ier, and pray for her. That, in my solitary work, never cease to have her in my thoughts. That he is with me, night and day. That if I died to-norrow, I would remember her with my last breath. But that I cannot look upon it!"

He slowly recalled his hand, and crushing the urse together, said with a kind of drowsy thought-ulness:

"I told her so. I told her so, as plain as words ould speak. I've taken this gift back and left it t her door, a dozen times since then. But when he came at last, and stood before me, face to face, vhat could I do?"

"You saw her!" exclaimed Meg. "You saw er! Oh, Lilian, my sweet girl! Oh, Lilian, ilian!"

"I saw her," he went on to say, not answering, ut engaged in the same slow pursuit of his own oughts. "There she stood: trembling! 'How oes she look, Richard? Does she ever speak of e? Is she thinner? My old place at the table: vhat's in my old place? And the frame she taught e our old work on—has she burnt it, Richard!" There she was. I heard her say it."

Meg checked her sobs, and with the tears stream-

ing from her eyes, bent over him to listen. Not to lose a breath.

With his arms resting on his knees; and stooping forward in his chair, as if what he said were written on the ground in some half legible character, which it was his occupation to decipher and connect; he went on.

"'Richard, I have fallen very low; and you may guess how much I have suffered in having this sent back, when I can bear to bring it in my hand to you. But you loved her once, even in my memory, dearly. Others stepped in between you; fears, and jealousies, and doubts, and vanities, estranged you from her; but you did love her, even in my memory!' I suppose I did," he said, interrupting himself for a moment. "I did! That's neither here nor there. 'O Richard, if you ever did; if you have any memory for what is gone and lost, take it to her once more. Once more! Tell her how I begged and prayed. Tell her how I laid my head upon your shoulder, where her own head might have lain, and was so humble to you, Richard. Tell her that you looked into my face, and saw the beauty which she used to praise, all gone: all gone: and in its place, a poor, wan, hollow cheek, that she would weep to see. Tell her everything, and take it back, and she will not refuse again. She will not have the heart!'"

So he sat musing, and repeating the last words, until he woke again, and rose.

"You won't take it, Margaret."

She shook her head, and motioned an entreaty to him to leave her.

"Good night, Margaret."

"Good night!"

He turned to look upon her; struck by her orrow, and perhaps by the pity for himself which rembled in her voice. It was a quick and rapid ction; and for the moment some flash of his old ›earing kindled in his form. In the next he went s he had come. Nor did this glimmer of a quenched fire seem to light him to a quicker sense of his debasement.

In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the nind or body, Meg's work must be done. She at down to her task, and plied it. Night, midnight. Still she worked.

She had a meagre fire, the night being very cold; nd rose at intervals to mind it. The Chimes rang ıalf-past twelve while she was thus engaged; and vhen they ceased she heard a gentle knocking at he door. Before she could so much as wonder vho was there, at that unusual hour, it opened.

Oh Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, ook at this! Oh Youth and Beauty, blest and ›lessing all within your reach, and working out the nds of your Beneficent Creator, look at this!

She saw the entering figure; screamed its name; ried "Lilian!"

It was swift, and fell upon its knees before her: linging to her dress.

"Up, dear! Up! Lilian! My own dearest!"

"Never more, Meg; never more! Here! Here! Close to you, holding to you, feeling your ear breath upon my face!"

"Sweet Lilian! Darling Lilian! Child of ny heart—no mother's love can be more tender—ay your head upon my breast!"

"Never more, Meg. Never more! When I irst looked into your face, you knelt before me.

On my knees before you, let me die. Let it be here!"

"You have come back. My Treasure! We will live together, work together, hope together, die together!"

"Ah! Kiss my lips, Meg; fold your arms about me; press me to your bosom; look kindly on me; but don't raise me. Let it be here. Let me see the last of your dear face upon my knees!"

Oh Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this! Oh Youth and Beauty, working out the ends of your Beneficent Creator, look at this!

"Forgive me, Meg! So dear, so dear! Forgive me! I know you do, I see you do, but say so, Meg!"

She said so, with her lips on Lilian's cheek. And with her arms twined round—she knew it now—a broken heart.

"His blessing on you, dearest love. Kiss me once more! He suffered her to sit beside His feet, and dry them with her hair. Oh Meg, what Mercy and Compassion!"

As she died, the Spirit of the child returning, innocent and radiant, touched the old man with its hand, and beckoned him away.

FOURTH QUARTER

SOME new remembrance of the ghostly figures in the Bell; some faint impression of the ringing of the Chimes; some giddy consciousness of having seen the swarm of phantoms reproduced and reproduced until the recollection of them lost itself in the confusion of their numbers; some hurried knowledge, how conveyed to him he knew not, that more years had passed; and Trotty, with the Spirit of the child attending him, stood looking on at mortal company.

Fat company, rosy-cheeked company, comfortable company. They were but two, but they were red enough for ten. They sat before a bright fire, with a small low table between them; and unless the fragrance of hot tea and muffins lingered longer in that room than in most others, the table had seen service very lately. But all the cups and saucers being clean, and in their proper places in the corner cupboard; and the brass toasting-fork hanging in its usual nook, and spreading its four idle fingers out, as if it wanted to be measured for a glove; there remained no other visible tokens of the meal just finished, than such as purred and washed their whiskers in the person of the basking cat, and glistened in the gracious, not to say the greasy, faces of her patrons.

This cosy couple (married, evidently) had made

a fair division of the fire between them, and sat looking at the glowing sparks that dropped into the grate; now nodding off into a doze; now waking up again when some hot fragment, larger than the rest, came rattling down, as if the fire were coming with it.

It was in no danger of sudden extinction, however; for it gleamed not only in the little room, and on the panes of window-glass in the door, and on the curtain half drawn across them, but in the little shop beyond. A little shop, quite crammed and choked with the abundance of its stock; a perfectly voracious little shop, with a maw as accommodating and full as any shark's. Cheese, butter, firewood, soap, pickles, matches, bacon, table-beer, peg-tops, sweetmeats, boys' kites, bird-seed, cold ham, birch brooms, hearth-stones, salt, vinegar, blacking, red-herrings, stationery, lard, mushroom-ketchup, stay-laces, loaves of bread, shuttlecocks, eggs, and slate pencil: everything was fish that came to the net of this greedy little shop, and all these articles were in its net. How many other kinds of petty merchandise were there, it would be difficult to say; but balls of packthread, ropes of onions, pounds of candles, cabbage-nets, and brushes, hung in bunches from the ceiling, like extraordinary fruit; while various odd canisters emitting aromatic smells, established the veracity of the inscription over the outer door, which informed the public that the keeper of this little shop was a licensed dealer in tea, coffee, tobacco, pepper, and snuff.

Glancing at such of these articles as were visible in the shining of the blaze, and the less cheerful radiance of two smoky lamps which burnt but dimly in the shop itself, as though its plethora sat

heavy on their lungs; and glancing, then, at one of the two faces by the parlour-fire; Trotty had small difficulty in recognising in the stout old lady, Mrs. Chickenstalker: always inclined to corpulency, even in the days when he had known her as established in the general line, and having a small balance against him in her books.

The features of her companion were less easy to him. The great broad chin, with creases in it large enough to hide a finger in; the astonished eyes, that seemed to expostulate with themselves for sinking deeper and deeper into the yielding fat of the soft face; the nose afflicted with that disordered action of its functions which is generally termed The Snuffles; the short thick throat and labouring chest, with other beauties of the like description; though calculated to impress the memory, Trotty could at first allot to nobody he had ever known: and yet he had some recollection of them too. At length, in Mrs. Chickenstalker's partner in the general line, and in the crooked and eccentric line of life, he recognised the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley; an apoplectic innocent, who had connected himself in Trotty's mind with Mrs. Chickenstalker years ago, by giving him admission to the mansion where he had confessed his obligations to that lady, and drawn on his unlucky head such grave reproach.

Trotty had little interest in a change like this, after the changes he had seen; but association is very strong sometimes: and he looked involuntarily behind the parlour-door, where the accounts of credit customers were usually kept in chalk. There was no record of his name. Some names were there, but they were strange to him, and infinitely

fewer than of old; from which he augured that the porter was an advocate of ready money transactions, and on coming into the business had looked pretty sharp after the Chickenstalker defaulters.

So desolate was Trotty, and so mournful for the youth and promise of his blighted child, that it was a sorrow to him, even to have no place in Mrs. Chickenstalker's ledger.

"What sort of a night is it, Anne?" inquired the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley, stretching out his legs before the fire, and rubbing as much of them as his short arms could reach: with an air that added, "Here I am if it's bad, and I don't want to go out if it's good."

"Blowing and sleeting hard," returned his wife; "and threatening snow. Dark. And very cold."

"I'm glad to think we had muffins," said the former porter, in the tone of one who had set his conscience at rest. "It's a sort of night that's meant for muffins. Likewise crumpets. Also Sally Lunns."

The former porter mentioned each successive kind of eatable, as if he were musingly summing up his good actions. After which he rubbed his fat legs as before, and jerking them at the knees to get the fire upon the yet unroasted parts, laughed as if somebody had tickled him.

"You're in spirits, Tugby, my dear," observed his wife.

The firm was Tugby, late Chickenstalker.

"No," said Tugby. "No. Not particular. I'm a little elewated. The muffins came so pat!"

With that he chuckled until he was black in the face; and had so much ado to become any other colour, that his fat legs took the strangest excursions

nto the air. Nor were they reduced to anything ike decorum until Mrs. Tugby had thumped him iolently on the back, and shaken him as if he were ı great bottle.

"Good gracious, goodness, lord-a-mercy bless ınd save the man!" cried Mrs. Tugby, in great error. "What's he doing?"

Mr. Tugby wiped his eyes, and faintly repeated hat he found himself a little elewated.

"Then don't be so again, that's a dear good oul," said Mrs. Tugby, "if you don't want to frighten me to death, with your struggling and fighting!"

Mr. Tugby said he wouldn't, but his whole existence was a fight; in which, if any judgment might be founded on the constantly-increasing shortness of his breath, and the deepening purple of his face, he was always getting the worst of it.

"So it's blowing, and sleeting, and threatening snow; and is dark, and very cold: is it, my dear?" said Mr. Tugby, looking at the fire, and reverting to the cream and marrow of his temporary elevation.

"Hard weather indeed," returned his wife, shaking her head.

"Ay, ay! Years," said Mr. Tugby, "are like Christians in that respect. Some of 'em die hard; some of 'em die easy. This one hasn't many days o run, and is making a fight for it. I like him all the better. There's a customer, my love!"

Attentive to the rattling door, Mrs. Tugby had lready risen.

"Now then!" said that lady, passing out into the little shop. "What's wanted? Oh! I beg your pardon, Sir, I'm sure. I didn't think it was you."

She made this apology to a gentleman in black who, with his wristbands tucked up, and his ha cocked loungingly on one side, and his hands i his pockets, sat down astride on the table-bee barrel, and nodded in return.

"This is a bad business upstairs, Mrs. Tugby,' said the gentleman. "The man can't live."

"Not the back-attic can't!" cried Tugby, comin out into the shop to join the conference.

"The back-attic, Mr. Tugby," said the gentle-man, "is coming downstairs fast; and will be belov the basement very soon."

Looking by turns at Tugby and his wife, h sounded the barrel with his knuckles for the depth of beer, and having found it, played a tune upo the empty part.

"The back-attic, Mr. Tugby," said the gen tleman: Tugby having stood in silent consternatio for some time: "is Going."

"Then," said Tugby, turning to his wife, "H must Go, you know, before he's Gone."

"I don't think you can move him," said th gentleman, shaking his head. "I wouldn't tak the responsibility of saying it could be done myself You had better leave him where he is. He can' live long."

"It's the only subject," said Tugby, bringin the butter-scale down upon the counter with crash, by weighing his fist on it, "that we've eve had a word upon; she and me; and look wha it comes to! He's going to die here, after all Going to die upon the premises. Going to die i our house!"

"And where should he have died, Tugby?" cried his wife.

"In the workhouse," he returned. "What are workhouses made for?"

"Not for that," said Mrs. Tugby, with great energy. "Not for that. Neither did I marry you for that. Don't think it, Tugby. I won't have it. I won't allow it. I'd be separated first, and never see your face again. When my widow's name stood over that door, as it did for many years: this house being known as Mrs. Chickenstalker's far and wide, and never known but to its honest credit and its good report: when my widow's name stood over that door, Tugby, I knew him as a handsome, steady, manly, independent youth; I knew her as the sweetest-looking, sweetest-tempered girl, eyes ever saw; I knew her father (poor old creetur, he fell down from the steeple walking in his sleep, and killed himself), for the simplest, hardest-working, childest-hearted man, that ever drew the breath of life; and when I turn them out of house and home, may angels turn me out of Heaven. As they would! And serve me right!"

Her old face, which had been a plump and dimpled one before the changes which had come to pass, seemed to shine out of her as she said these words; and when she dried her eyes, and shook her head and her handkerchief at Tugby, with an expression of firmness which it was quite clear was not to be easily resisted, Trotty said, "Bless her! Bless her!"

Then he listened, with a panting heart, for what should follow. Knowing nothing yet, but that they spoke of Meg.

If Tugby had been a little elevated in the parlour, he more than balanced that account by

being not a little depressed in the shop, where he now stood staring at his wife, without attempting a reply; secretly conveying, however—either in a fit of abstraction or as a precautionary measure—all the money from the till into his own pockets, as he looked at her.

The gentleman upon the table-beer cask, who appeared to be some authorised medical attendant upon the poor, was far too well accustomed, evidently, to little differences of opinion between man and wife, to interpose any remark in this instance. He sat softly whistling, and turning little drops of beer out of the tap upon the ground, until there was a perfect calm: when he raised his head, and said to Mrs. Tugby, late Chickenstalker:

"There's something interesting about the woman, even now. How did she come to marry him?"

"Why that," said Mrs. Tugby, taking a seat near him, "is not the least cruel part of her story, Sir. You see they kept company, she and Richard, many years ago. When they were a young and beautiful couple, everything was settled, and they were to have been married on a New Year's Day. But, somehow, Richard got it into his head, through what the gentlemen told him, that he might do better, and that he'd soon repent it, and that she wasn't good enough for him, and that a young man of spirit had no business to be married. And the gentlemen frightened her, and made her melancholy, and timid of his deserting her, and of her children coming to the gallows, and of its being wicked to be man and wife, and a good deal more of it. And in short, they

ngered and lingered, and their [illegible] in one another was broken, and so at last was the [illegible]tch. But he fault was his. She would have married him, Sir, joyfully. I've seen her heart swell, many times afterwards, when he passed her in a proud and careless way; and never did a woman grieve more truly for a man, than she for Richard when he first went wrong."

"Oh! he went wrong, did he?" said the gentleman, pulling out the vent-peg of the table-beer, and trying to peep down into the barrel through the hole.

"Well, Sir, I don't know that he rightly understood himself, you see. I think his mind was troubled by their having broke with one another; and that but for being ashamed before the gentlemen, and perhaps for being uncertain too, how she might take it, he'd have gone through any suffering or trial to have had Meg's promise and Meg's hand again. That's my belief. He never said so; more's the pity! He took to drinking, idling, bad companions: all the fine resources that were to be so much better for him than the Home he might have had. He lost his looks, his character, his health, his strength, his friends, his work: everything!"

"He didn't lose everything, Mrs. Tugby," returned the gentleman, "because he gained a wife; and I want to know how he gained her."

"I'm coming to it, Sir, in a moment. This went on for years and years; he sinking lower and lower; she enduring, poor thing, miseries enough to wear her life away. At last, he was so cast down, and cast out, that no one would employ or notice him; and doors were shut upon him, go

where he would. Applying from place to place, and door to door; and coming for the hundredth time to one gentleman who had often and often tried him (he was a good workman to the very end); that gentleman, who knew his history, said, 'I believe you are incorrigible; there is only one person in the world who has a chance of reclaiming you; ask me to trust you no more, until she tries to do it.' Something like that, in his anger and vexation."

"Ah!" said the gentleman. "Well?"

"Well, Sir, he went to her, and kneeled to her; said it was so; said it ever had been so; and made a prayer to her to save him."

"And she—Don't distress yourself, Mrs. Tugby."

"She came to me that night to ask me about living here. 'What he was once to me,' she said, 'is buried in a grave; side by side with what I was to him. But I have thought of this; and I will make the trial. In the hope of saving him; for the love of the light-hearted girl (you remember her) who was to have been married on a New Year's Day; and for the love of her Richard.' And she said he had come to her from Lilian, and Lilian had trusted to him, and she never could forget that. So they were married; and when they came home here, and I saw them, I hoped that such prophecies as parted them when they were young, may not often fulfil themselves as they did in this case, or I wouldn't be the makers of them for a Mine of Gold."

The gentleman got off the cask, and stretched himself, observing:

"I suppose he used her ill, as soon as they were married?"

"I don't think he ever did that," said Mrs. Tugby, shaking her head, and wiping her eyes. "He went on better for a short time; but, his habits were too old and strong to be got rid of; he soon fell back a little; and was falling fast back, when his illness came so strong upon him. I think he has always felt for her. I am sure he has. I have seen him, in his crying fits and tremblings, try to kiss her hand; and I have heard him call her 'Meg,' and say it was her nineteenth birthday. There he has been lying, now, these weeks and months. Between him and her baby, she has not been able to do her old work; and by not being able to be regular, she has lost it, even if she could have done it. How they have lived, I hardly know!"

"*I* know," muttered Mr. Tugby; looking at the till, and round the shop, and at his wife; and rolling his head with immense intelligence. "Like Fighting Cocks!"

He was interrupted by a cry—a sound of lamentation—from the upper storey of the house. The gentleman moved hurriedly to the door.

"My friend," he said, looking back, "you needn't discuss whether he shall be removed or not. He has spared you that trouble, I believe."

Saying so, he ran upstairs, followed by Mrs. Tugby; while Mr. Tugby panted and grumbled after them at leisure: being rendered more than commonly short-winded by the weight of the till, in which there had been an inconvenient quantity of copper. Trotty, with the child beside him, floated up the staircase like mere air.

"Follow her! Follow her! Follow her!" He heard the ghostly voices in the Bells repeat

their words as he ascended. "Learn it, from the creature dearest to your heart!"

It was over. It was over. And this was she, her father's pride and joy! This haggard, wretched woman, weeping by the bed, if it deserved that name, and pressing to her breast, and hanging down her head upon, an infant. Who can tell how spare, how sickly, and how poor an infant? Who can tell how dear!

"Thank God!" cried Trotty, holding up his folded hands. "Oh, God be thanked! She loves her child!"

The gentleman, not otherwise hard-hearted or indifferent to such scenes, than that he saw them every day, and knew that they were figures of no moment in the Filer sums—mere scratches in the working of these calculations—laid his hand upon the heart that beat no more, and listened for the breath, and said, "His pain is over. It's better as it is!" Mrs. Tugby tried to comfort her with kindness. Mr. Tugby tried philosophy.

"Come, come!" he said, with his hands in his pockets, "you mustn't give way, you know. That won't do. You must fight up. What would have become of me if *I* had given way when I was porter; and we had as many as six runaway carriage-doubles at our door in one night! But I fell back upon my strength of mind, and didn't open it!"

Again Trotty heard the voices, saying, "Follow her!" He turned towards his guide, and saw it rising from him, passing through the air. "Follow her!" it said. And vanished.

He hovered round her; sat down at her feet; looked up into her face for one trace of her old

self; listened for one note of her old pleasant voice. He flitted round the child: so wan, so prematurely old, so dreadful in its gravity, so plaintive in its feeble, mournful, miserable wail. He almost worshipped it. He clung to it as her only safeguard; as the last unbroken link that bound her to endurance. He set his father's hope and trust on the frail baby; watched her every look upon it as she held it in her arms; and cried a thousand times, "She loves it! God be thanked, she loves it!"

He saw the woman tend her in the night; return to her when her grudging husband was asleep, and all was still; encourage her, shed tears with her, set nourishment before her. He saw the day come, and the night again; the day, the night; the time go by; the house of death relieved of death; the room left to herself and to the child; he heard it moan and cry; he saw it harass her, and tire her out, and when she slumbered in exhaustion, drag her back to consciousness, and hold her with its little hands upon the rack; but she was constant to it, gentle with it, patient with it. Patient! Was its loving mother in her inmost heart and soul, and had its Being knitted up with hers as when she carried it unborn.

All this time, she was in want: languishing away, in dire and pining want. With the baby in her arms, she wandered here and there, in quest of occupation; and with its thin face lying in her lap, and looking up in hers, did any work for any wretched sum: a day and night of labour for as many farthings as there were figures on the dial. If she had quarrelled with it; if she had neglected it; if she had looked upon it with a moment's hate; if, in the frenzy of an instant, she had

struck it! No. His comfort was, She loved it always.

She told no one of her extremity, and wandered abroad in the day lest she should be questioned by her only friend: for any help she received from her hands, occasioned fresh disputes between the good woman and her husband; and it was new bitterness to be the daily cause of strife and discord, where she owed so much.

She loved it still. She loved it more and more. But a change fell on the aspect of her love. One night.

She was singing faintly to it in its sleep, and walking to and fro to hush it, when her door was softly opened, and a man looked in.

"For the last time," he said.

"William Fern!"

"For the last time."

He listened like a man pursued: and spoke in whispers.

"Margaret, my race is nearly run. I couldn't finish it, without a parting word with you. Without one grateful word."

"What have you done?" she asked: regarding him with terror.

He looked at her, but gave no answer.

After a short silence, he made a gesture with his hand, as if he set her question by; as if he brushed it aside; and said,

"It's long ago, Margaret, now: but that night is as fresh in my memory as ever 'twas. We little thought, then," he added, looking round, "that we should ever meet like this. Your child, Margaret. Let me have it in my arms. Let me hold your child."

He put his hat upon the floor, and took it. And he trembled as he took it, from head to foot.

"Is it a girl?"

"Yes."

He put his hand before its little face.

"See how weak I'm grown, Margaret, when I want the courage to look at it! Let her be a moment. I won't hurt her. It's long ago, but—What's her name?"

"Margaret," she answered, quickly.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "I'm glad of that."

He seemed to breathe more freely; and after pausing for an instant, took away his hand, and looked upon the infant's face. But covered it again, immediately.

"Margaret!" he said; and gave her back the child. "It's Lilian's."

"Lilian's!"

"I held the same face in my arms when Lilian's mother died and left her."

"When Lilian's mother died and left her!" she repeated, wildly.

"How shrill you speak! Why do you fix your eyes upon me so? Margaret!"

She sank down in a chair, and pressed the infant to her breast, and wept over it. Sometimes, she released it from her embrace, to look anxiously in its face: then strained it to her bosom again. At those times: when she gazed upon it: then it was that something fierce and terrible began to mingle with her love. Then it was that her old father quailed.

"Follow her!" was sounded through the house. "Learn it, from the creature dearest to your heart!"

"Margaret," said Fern, bending over her, and kissing her upon the brow: "I thank you for the last time. Good night. Good bye. Put your hand in mine, and tell me you'll forget me from this hour, and try to think the end of me was here."

"What have you done!" she asked again.

"There'll be a Fire to-night," he said, removing from her. "There'll be Fires this winter-time, to light the dark nights, East, West, North, and South. When you see the distant sky red, they'll be blazing. When you see the distant sky red, think of me no more; or if you do, remember what a Hell was lighted up inside of me, and think you see its flames reflected in the clouds. Good night. Good bye!"

She called to him; but he was gone. She sat down stupefied, until her infant roused her to a sense of hunger, cold, and darkness. She paced the room with it the livelong night, hushing it and soothing it. She said at intervals, "Like Lilian, when her mother died and left her!" Why was her step so quick, her eye so wild, her love so fierce and terrible, whenever she repeated those words?

"But it is Love," said Trotty. "It is Love. She'll never cease to love it. My poor Meg!"

She dressed the child next morning with unusual care—ah vain expenditure of care upon such squalid robes!—and once more tried to find some means of life. It was the last day of the Old Year. She tried till night, and never broke her fast. She tried in vain.

She mingled with an abject crowd, who tarried in the snow, until it pleased some officer appointed to dispense the public charity (the lawful charity;

not that once preached upon a Mount), to call them in, and question them, and say to this one, "Go to such a place," to that one, "Come next week"; to make a football of another wretch, and pass him here and there, from hand to hand, from house to house, until he wearied and lay down to die; or started up and robbed, and so became a higher sort of criminal, whose claims allowed of no delay. Here, too, she failed.

She loved her child, and wished to have it lying on her breast. And that was quite enough.

It was night: a bleak, dark, cutting night: when, pressing the child close to her for warmth, she arrived outside the house she called her home. She was so faint and giddy, that she saw no one standing in the doorway until she was close upon it, and about to enter. Then she recognised the master of the house, who had so disposed himself —with his person it was not difficult—as to fill up the whole entry.

"Oh!" he said, softly. "You have come back?"

She looked at the child, and shook her head.

"Don't you think you have lived here long enough without paying any rent? Don't you think that, without any money, you've been a pretty constant customer at this shop, now?" said Mr. Tugby.

She repeated the same mute appeal.

"Suppose you try and deal somewhere else," he said. "And suppose you provide yourself with another lodging. Come! Don't you think you could manage it?"

She said, in a low voice, that it was very late. To-morrow.

"Now I see what you want," said Tugby; "and what you mean. You know there are two parties in this house about you, and you delight in setting 'em by the ears. I don't want any quarrels; I'm speaking softly to avoid a quarrel; but if you don't go away, I'll speak out loud, and you shall cause words high enough to please you. But you shan't come in. That I am determined."

She put her hair back with her hand, and looked in a sudden manner at the sky, and the dark lowering distance.

"This is the last night of an Old Year: and I won't carry ill-blood and quarrellings and disturbances into a New One, to please you nor anybody else," said Tugby, who was quite a retail Friend and Father. "I wonder you an't ashamed of yourself, to carry such practices into a New Year. If you haven't any business in the world, but to be always giving way, and always making disturbances between man and wife, you'd be better out of it. Go along with you."

"Follow her! To desperation!"

Again the old man heard the voices. Looking up, he saw the figures hovering in the air, and pointing where she went, down the dark street.

"She loves it!" he exclaimed, in agonised entreaty for her. "Chimes! she loves it still!"

"Follow her!" The shadows swept upon the track she had taken, like a cloud.

He joined in the pursuit; he kept close to her; he looked into her face. He saw the same fierce and terrible expression mingling with her love, and kindling in her eyes. He heard her say, "Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!" and her speed redoubled.

Oh, for something to awaken her. For any sight, or sound, or scent, to call up tender recollections in a brain on fire! For any gentle image of the Past, to rise before her!

"I was her father! I was her father!" cried the old man, stretching out his hands to the dark shadows flying on above. "Have mercy on her, and on me! Where does she go? Turn her back! I was her father!"

But they only pointed to her, as she hurried on; and said, "To desperation! Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!"

A hundred voices echoed it. The air was made of breath expended in those words. He seemed to take them in, at every gasp he drew. They were everywhere, and not to be escaped. And still she hurried on; the same light in her eyes, the same words in her mouth; "Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!"

All at once she stopped.

"Now, turn her back!" exclaimed the old man, tearing his white hair. "My child! Meg! Turn her back! Great Father, turn her back!"

In her own scanty shawl, she wrapped the baby warm. With her fevered hands, she smoothed its limbs, composed its face, arranged its mean attire. In her wasted arms she folded it, as though she never would resign it more. And with her dry lips, kissed it in a final pang, and last long agony of Love.

Putting its tiny hand up to her neck, and holding it there, within her dress: next to her distracted heart: she set its sleeping face against her: closely, steadily, against her: and sped onward to the River.

To the rolling River, swift and dim, where Winter Night sat brooding like the last dark thoughts of many who had sought a refuge there before her. Where scattered lights upon the banks gleamed sullen, red, and dull, as torches that were burning there, to show the way to Death. Where no abode of living people cast its shadow, on the deep, impenetrable, melancholy shade.

To the River! To that portal of Eternity, her desperate footsteps tended with the swiftness of its rapid waters running to the sea. He tried to touch her as she passed him, going down to its dark level; but the wild distempered form, the fierce and terrible love, the desperation that had left all human check or hold behind, swept by him like the wind.

He followed her. She paused a moment on the brink, before the dreadful plunge. He fell down on his knees, and in a shriek addressed the figures in the Bells now hovering above them.

"I have learnt it!" cried the old man. "From the creature dearest to my heart! Oh, save her, save her!"

He could wind his fingers in her dress; could hold it! As the words escaped his lips, he felt his sense of touch return, and knew that he detained her.

The figures looked down steadfastly upon him.

"I have learnt it!" cried the old man. "Oh, have mercy on me in this hour, if, in my love for her, so young and good, I slandered Nature in the breasts of mothers rendered desperate! Pity my presumption, wickedness, and ignorance, and save her!"

He felt his hold relaxing. They were silent still.

"Have mercy on her!" he exclaimed, "as one in whom this dreadful crime has sprung from

Love perverted; from the strongest, deepest Love we fallen creatures know! Think what her misery must have been, when such seed bears such fruit! Heaven meant her to be good. There is no loving mother on the earth who might not come to this, if such a life had gone before. Oh, have mercy on my child, who, even at this pass, means mercy to her own, and dies herself, and perils her Immortal Soul, to save it!"

She was in his arms. He held her now. His strength was like a giant's.

"I see the Spirit of the Chimes among you!" cried the old man, singling out the child, and speaking in some inspiration, which their looks conveyed to him. "I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by Time. I know there is a Sea of Time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like leaves. I see it, on the flow! I know that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor doubt the Good in one another. I have learnt it from the creature dearest to my heart. I clasp her in my arms again. Oh Spirits, merciful and good, I take your lesson to my breast along with her! Oh Spirits, merciful and good, I am grateful!"

He might have said more, but the Bells; the old familiar Bells, his own dear, constant, steady friends, the Chimes; began to ring the joy-peals for a New Year, so lustily, so merrily, so happily, so gaily, that he leapt upon his feet, and broke the spell that bound him.

"And whatever you do, father," said Meg, "don't eat tripe again, without asking some doctor

whether it's likely to agree with you; for how you *have* been going on, Good gracious!"

She was working with her needle, at the little table by the fire; dressing her simple gown with ribbons for her wedding. So quietly happy, so blooming and youthful, so full of beautiful promise, that he uttered a great cry as if it were an Angel in his house; then flew to clasp her in his arms.

But he caught his feet in the newspaper, which had fallen on the hearth; and somebody came rushing in between them.

"No!" cried the voice of this same somebody; a generous and jolly voice it was! "Not even you. Not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the New Year is mine. Mine! I have been waiting outside the house, this hour, to hear the Bells and claim it. Meg, my precious prize, a happy year! A life of happy years, my darling wife!"

And Richard smothered her with kisses.

You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. I don't care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in your life saw anything at all approaching him! He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg; he got out of his chair and hugged Richard; he got out of his chair and hugged them both at once; he kept running up to Meg, and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backwards not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a

figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did, he was constantly sitting himself down in this chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment; being — that's the truth — beside himself with joy.

"And to-morrow's your wedding-day, my pet!" cried Trotty. "Your real, happy wedding-day!"

"To-day!" cried Richard, shaking hands with him. "To-day. The Chimes are ringing in the New Year. Hear them!"

They WERE ringing! Bless their sturdy hearts, they WERE ringing! Great Bells as they were: melodious, deep-mouthed, noble Bells; cast in no common metal; made by no common founder; when had they ever chimed like that before!

"But to-day, my pet," said Trotty. "You and Richard had some words to-day."

"Because he's such a bad fellow, father," said Meg. "An't you, Richard? Such a headstrong, violent man! He'd have made no more of speaking his mind to that great Alderman, and putting *him* down I don't know where, than he would of——"

"—Kissing Meg," suggested Richard. Doing it too!

"No. Not a bit more," said Meg. "But I wouldn't let him, father. Where would have been the use!"

"Richard my boy!" cried Trotty. "You was turned up Trumps originally; and Trumps you must be, till you die! But you were crying by the fire to-night, my pet, when I came home! Why did you cry by the fire?"

"I was thinking of the years we've passed

together, father. Only that. And thinking you might miss me, and be lonely."

Trotty was backing off to that extraordinary chair again, when the child, who had been awakened by the noise, came running in half-dressed.

"Why, here she is!" cried Trotty, catching her up. "Here's little Lilian! Ha ha ha! Here we are and here we go! Oh here we are and here we go again! And here we are and here we go! and Uncle Will too!" Stopping in his trot to greet him heartily. "Oh, Uncle Will, the vision that I've had to-night, through lodging you! Oh, Uncle Will, the obligations that you've laid me under, by your coming, my good friend!"

Before Will Fern could make the least reply, a band of music burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbours, screaming "A Happy New Year, Meg!" "A Happy Wedding!" "Many of 'em!" and other fragmentary good wishes of that sort. The Drum (who was a private friend of Trotty's) then stepped forward, and said:

"Trotty Veck, my boy! It's got about, that your daughter is going to be married to-morrow. There an't a soul that knows you that don't wish you well, or that knows her and don't wish her well. Or that knows you both, and don't wish you both all the happiness the New Year can bring. And here we are, to play it in and dance it in, accordingly."

Which was received with a general shout. The Drum was rather drunk, by the bye; but never mind.

"What a happiness it is, I'm sure," said Trotty,

"to be so esteemed! How kind and neighbourly you are! It's all along of my dear daughter. She deserves it!"

They were ready for a dance in half a second (Meg and Richard at the top); and the Drum was on the very brink of leathering away with all his power; when a combination of prodigious sounds was heard outside, and a good-humoured comely woman of some fifty years of age, or thereabouts, came running in, attended by a man bearing a stone pitcher of terrific size, and closely followed by the marrow-bones and cleavers, and the bells; not *the* Bells, but a portable collection, on a frame.

Trotty said, "It's Mrs. Chickenstalker!" And sat down, and beat his knees again.

"Married, and not tell me, Meg!" cried the good woman. "Never! I couldn't rest on the last night of the Old Year without coming to wish you joy. I couldn't have done it, Meg. Not if I had been bedridden. So here I am; and as it's New Year's Eve, and the Eve of your wedding too, my dear, I had a little flip made, and brought it with me."

Mrs. Chickenstalker's notion of a little flip, did honour to her character. The pitcher steamed and smoked and reeked like a volcano; and the man who had carried it, was faint.

"Mrs. Tugby!" said Trotty, who had been going round and round her, in an ecstasy. "I *should* say, Chickenstalker—Bless your heart and soul! A Happy New Year, and many of 'em! Mrs. Tugby," said Trotty when he had saluted her; "I *should* say, Chickenstalker—This is William Fern and Lilian."

The worthy dame, to his surprise, turned very pale and very red.

"Not Lilian Fern whose mother died in Dorsetshire!" said she.

Her uncle answered "Yes," and meeting hastily, they exchanged some hurried words together; of which the upshot was, that Mrs. Chickenstalker shook him by both hands; saluted Trotty on his cheek again, of her own free will; and took the child to her capacious breast.

"Will Fern!" said Trotty, pulling on his right-hand muffler. "Not the friend that you was hoping to find?"

"Ay!" returned Will, putting a hand on each of Trotty's shoulders. "And like to prove a'most as good a friend, if that can be, as one I found."

"Oh!" said Trotty. "Please to play up there. Will you have the goodness!"

To the music of the band, the bells, the marrow-bones and cleavers, all at once; and while the Chimes were yet in lusty operation out of doors; Trotty, making Meg and Richard second couple, led off Mrs. Chickenstalker down the dance, and danced it in a step unknown before or since; founded on his own peculiar trot.

Had Trotty dreamed? Or are his joys and sorrows, and the actors in them, but a dream; himself a dream; the teller of this tale a dreamer, waking but now? If it be so, oh Listener, dear to him in all his visions, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; and in your sphere—none is too wide, and none too limited for such an end—endeavour to correct, improve, and soften them. So may the New Year be

a Happy one to You, Happy to many more whose Happiness depends on You! So may each Year be happier than the last, and not the meanest of our brethren or sisterhood debarred their rightful share, in what our Great Creator formed them to enjoy.

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